

Ileodictyon cibarium Tul. ex M. Raoul, 1844

Common Name: Basket Fungus, Lattice Fungus.

Description: A white, open-lattice ball, diameter to 250 mm, often detaching from the volva upon full maturity.

Egg: Dirty white, smooth-skinned with dimples reflecting the net-like structure of the not-yet expanded arms within, up to 70 mm diameter, with white rhizomorphs at the base. The egg remnants are seen as a whitish volva at the base, however, the receptacle often detaches from this and may be carried by the wind for some distance from its place of origin.



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Stipe: None.

Arms: The arms are joined to create a net or mesh that forms a cage-like structure. If there are a lot of arms, there may be up to 30 fairly regular polygonal-shaped spaces in the net. The arms may join so symmetrically that, if the receptacle detaches from the volva, it is not possible to tell the top from the bottom. However, fewer arms mean fewer spaces and those spaces will be more uneven in size and more angular in shape. There is no noticeable thickening in the places where the arms join.

Translucent white, brittle and spongy in texture, up to 1cm wide and elliptical in cross-section, marked with creases which show the way the receptacle unfolded, concertina-like, from the egg. The surfaces may be smooth or wrinkled across the width; the outer surface may also be pitted or grooved along the length.

There is some variation in the internal structure of the arms. Some have a single tube that runs the length of the arm, or two tubes or, in rare cases, three tubes running side by side. Cunningham reported the interior to be coarsely cellular, but other mycologists since have reported only the tubular structure.

Gleba: Olive-brown, thick and slimy, carried on the entire inner surface of the arms. Odour described as foetid and “smelling of Camembert cheese”.

Spores: 4-6 x 1.8-3.3 μm , elongate, smooth, hyaline or tinted.

Habitat: Grows alone or in groups on the ground in garden mulch, in cultivated areas, in disturbed ground alongside roads and tracks, in woods and forests. May be in an exposed area or under bushes. Found all year round in tropical and subtropical areas.

Notes: This species has often been confused with *Ileodictyon gracile*. It is of similar size, shape and colour, but it differs by having wrinkled arms, which are not appreciably thickened at their junction with one another, and which are elliptical in cross-section. The arms are 4-5 times as wide as those of *Ileodictyon gracile*.

One mycologist, William Colenso of New Zealand, told a story about the explosive opening of one receptacle. "It was late in the autumn (May), when I was in a grassy spot on the confines of a small retired wood (whither I had often been in former years), when on seating myself on a dead prostrate tree I noticed two or three common specimens of *I. cibarium* showing themselves among the low herbage ; I collected them. On looking more closely I saw an olive-coloured egg-shaped fungoid substance peering up from the ground underneath a thick branch of the tree on which I was sitting, apparently as if it were pressed down by the branch. I broke the branch off carefully, when the egg-like substance rapidly burst open, and up sprang this fine specimen as if forcibly ejected by a spring, unfolding itself immediately to its full size. Its sudden and unexpected movement startled me ; but after admiring this wondrous production of Nature, and its astonishing internal powers,-seeing, too, it was but a weak and flimsy tender substance without nerves, I brought it carefully away in my handkerchief, and, after washing it with a feather in repeated waters (to remove its copious brownish slime of a most disagreeable odour, which is common to them all, including the closely-allied and handsome genus *Aseroe*), I dried it, and its volva or case, as a good specimen."

Transactions and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New Zealand, 1893. p. 308.

Cunningham also has a story about this fungus. "The appearance of these latticed hollow spheres without visible means of attachment to the substratum often mystified the ancient Maori. Forced to find some explanation of their (to him) mysterious origin, and guided no doubt by their characteristic foetid odour, he came to the conclusion that they were tutae kehua or tutae whetu ("Faeces of ghosts or of the stars"). The specific name was applied to the species under the impression that the unexpanded plant was used as food by the Maori. The late Mr. Elsdon Best, a renowned Maori scholar, advised me that the species was not included among the fungi the Maori considered edible. This is understandable as it is scarcely likely he would meddle with a plant which was evidently of supernatural origin."

The Gasteromycetes of Australia and New Zealand, p. 5.