

Flammulina velutipes, an extraordinary, ordinary mushroom

I like to think of *Flammulina velutipes* as an extraordinary, ordinary mushroom. The cap is a boring yellow-brown to reddish-brown, but is covered with a shiny, slimy film when young or when wet. So even though this mushroom almost qualifies as an LBM (Little Brown Mushroom), it is very photogenic. In fact, it is the only mushroom featured in both the 2011 and 2013 PSMC calendars. This mushroom fruits in late fall right through the winter to early spring. Go out after a few warm January days to find this mushroom growing from under the bark of dead trees. Extraordinary.



Photo by Marty Augustine

The cap of *F. velutipes* is 2 to 6 cm across, and fairly thick and substantial for its small size. The gills are cream colored to yellow and well spaced apart. The stem is where you make a positive identification for this mushroom. The common names include “Winter Mushroom”, “Velvet Foot”, “Velvet Stem”, or “Velvet Stalk”. So it comes as no surprise that the stem of *F. velutipes* is velvety. The color of the stem will transition from cream/yellow at the top, to nearly black at the base. Velvet Foot can be found as a

single mushroom, but more often they grow in caespitose clusters, meaning that many mushrooms emanate from a single point on the log.



Photo by Marty Augustine

To some people, Velvet Foot is a choice edible, but not everybody likes the slimy covering on the cap. Grown commercially, it is known as enotake or enokitake, and looks nothing like the wild version. If you are going to eat this mushroom, make sure you are positive of the identification. The deadly *Galerina* grows at the same time, and looks somewhat similar. It is not unusual to find them both on the same log at the same time. The Velvet Foot will always have a white spore print (see photo below) and no hint of a ring on the stem. The *Galerina* will have a brown spore print and a prominent or faint ring on the stem. It is recommended that beginners make a spore print for *each* Velvet Foot mushroom they plan to eat.

I enjoy getting outdoors in the winter, and I always look for this ordinary mushroom. More often than not, I can find some. Extraordinary.

Glen



Photo by Glen Schwartz