



Cortinarius erythrocephala

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Cortinarius erythrocephala is a distinctive bright red-brown to red-orange mushroom that grows amongst litter in the wetter areas of eucalypt forests and woodlands in southern Australia. In the southwest it can be found in both jarrah and karri forest in early to late autumn. Although they are brightly coloured they are surprisingly well camouflaged—especially when the surrounding leaf litter is wet.

Caps are conical in the button stage but when fully developed are usually 2.5–3.5cm diameter, broadly umbonate (central bump) with a moist surface. Gills are bright orange-red in colour and have a dry appearance compared to the moist surface of the cap. Stems are 10-15cm tall, yellowish-red, generally slender with dry, bright orange basal mycelium.

Cortinarius erythrocephala is easily confused with a similar species *Cortinarius kula* (inset above), and correct identification generally requires detailed examination of microscopic characters. Sometimes they are found growing in close proximity. Both species belong to a sub-group called Dermocybe which are generally brightly coloured; many also contain extractable pigments that can be used to dye fabrics.

The scientific name refers to a veil-like membrane that stretches between the cap margin and stem (typical for all cortinars) and the colour. *Cortin-*: curtain, *-arius*: pertaining to or possessing, *erythr-*: red or reddish, *cephal-*: head and *kula* is an aboriginal word meaning blood. *Derm-*: skin, *cybe-*: head.