



Marasmius elegans — velvet parachute

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Marasmius elegans, or velvet parachute, is a striking fungus found in mid-autumn in eucalypt forests and woodlands throughout southern Australia. It fruits in tight clusters or singly in small scattered groups, generally amongst thick leaf litter.

Caps are 3.5–4cm diameter, dome-shaped at first then expand to be flat, dark chestnut in colour with a dry velvet-textured surface. Gills are white, close together, have various lengths with the longer ones narrowly attached to the top of the stem. Stems are up to 7cm tall, slim, smooth, pure white at the apex then dark chestnut below. They have a tough texture and can have a mass of khaki or mottled bluish-green fungal material (mycelium) attached to the base.

If you carefully brush any loose litter away from the soil where fruit bodies are growing, you will expose the mats of mycelium from which the fruit bodies develop (*inset above*). This mycelium is the natural form of the fungus; it being the structure that excretes enzymes to decompose litter and other organic material. Fruit bodies are the reproductive structures.

The scientific name emphasises its attractive appearance compared to other species of *Marasmius*: *marasm-*: withered or emaciated, *-ius*: pertaining to or resembling, *elegans-*: elegant or choice.