

Yellow Flowerpot Mushrooms

By Celeste Silling

I recently came across a bright yellow mushroom in one of my planter pots. The bright Sulfur yellow color caught my eye, and suddenly I was seeing the same mushroom all over the place; it was outside of stores, in my succulent garden, on the side of the road, and on my patio! Out of curiosity, I decided to do some research on this rampant little fungus.

Leucocoprinus birnbaumii (luke-o-kuh-PRY-niss burn-BAUM-eee-eye), also known as the Flowerpot Parasol Mushroom or Lemon Yellow Lepiota is a common mushroom that can be found in house plants, gardens, or really any place where the temperature is warm and the soil is rich. It's a striking light-yellow color (I call it post-it notes yellow) on both the stalk and the cap, occasionally with some brown texture on top. The young mushrooms come up with almost spherical or football-shaped caps that eventually flatten out into an umbrella shape as they grow older.

As with many mushrooms, *Leucocoprinus birnbaumii* is toxic to humans. Mushroom experts always advise that unless you know with 100% certainty that a mushroom is edible, don't eat it! And even if you know that it is edible, make sure you know if it needs to be cooked or prepared. This yellow mushroom is toxic when eaten, but they're fine to look at and enjoy in your house plants. They aren't known to harm the plants themselves, so unless you have pets, children, or overly adventurous adults that might eat them, there's no harm in keeping them in your planters.

So where do these flowerpot parasols come from? Mushrooms are part of a larger fungus and only pop up when the fungus is ready to reproduce. The main part of the fungus, which is called the mycelium, is a tangled web that lives underground, kind of like the roots of a plant. The majority of these fungi reproduce by spreading spores, kind of like the seeds of a plant. Like a tree growing apples with seeds inside, the fungus grows a mushroom with spores inside.

The flowerpot parasols that we see popping out of our potted plants likely came directly from the bagged commercial potting mix that we used for planting. Spores are microscopic and so would be impossible to pick out of the soil once it's contaminated. This particular fungus seems to have cracked the system and is using human gardeners to spread its spores!

Along with the *birnbaumii* species, there are other types of *Leucocoprinus* mushrooms that can be found in Texas. *Leucocoprinus cepaestipes* has a similar shape to the flowerpot parasol, but is colored white, and *Leucocoprinus fragilissimus* is an almost see-through yellow. Neither of these are edible, but they're still fun to look at!

There are thousands of other mushroom species in Texas, and with the bulk of fungi being underground, you never know where or when they'll pop up! The Yellow Flowerpot Parasols only bloom for a few days or weeks, so appreciate this fun pop of color while you can!



Photo by Celeste Silling. Caption: The flowerpot parasol pops up in a planter.