



Octopus Stinkhorn Fungi (Clathrus archeri)

What is that weird flower?

This interesting organism is not a flower at all but a fungi. These fantastic fungi truly show their colours after a period of wet weather. The flower like octopus shaped fruiting body emerges from a puff ball type structure after prolonged periods of wet weather.



Do they cause a problem in the garden?

The short answer is no. They feed on decaying organic matter like leaf litter or mulch and do not attack living plants in a garden. The scientific name is *Clathrus archeri* (and also sometimes called *Lysurus archeri*, *Anthurus archeri* or *Pseudocolus archeri*), commonly known as Octopus Stinkhorn, is indigenous to Australia and Tasmania as well as a few other countries and has been introduced in Europe and North America. The main body of the fungus is actually below the ground and exists as fine white filaments that find their food (see image below).



Where do they come from and how do they spread?

They are most likely introduced into new gardens as part of soil or mulch used to construct gardens. They are also spread by flies who are attracted by the foul smell. The foul smell is caused by the small amounts of black or brown “mucus” that are produced on each arm of the fruiting body. This mucus contains the spores of the fungus and in this ingenious way they are able to use insects like flies to spread their offspring. How do you describe the smell? —well putrid flesh would be the closest description I can think of!



Octopus Stinkhorn Fungi (*Clathrus archeri*)

Do I need to control them?

In most situations the problem will disappear when garden beds dry out. I would strongly advise against using a fungicide as it will cause more damage than good. The many beneficial fungi that live in soil are more important to preserve than the slight chance of control that fungicides might use on octopus stinkhorn fungi. To minimise the smell remove the fruiting bodies of the fungus at the puff ball stage and dispose of in a sealed plastic bag. Interestingly the fungus is edible at the puff ball stage but not recommended due to the disgusting taste. Only for survival really. If you do handle the fungus make sure that you do not get the black mucus on your hands as the smell is said to hang around for ages.



Dark mucus containing spores usually spread by flies—avoid contact with the skin.

Remove at puffball stage around this size