

“Fungi are considered vegetable outcasts...”
— Mary Banning



NEW YORK STATE MUSEUM

FAMILY GUIDE: A CLOSER LOOK AT...

Outcasts: Mary Banning's World of Mushrooms

SOUTH HALL



Words to know when looking at Mary Banning's illustrations

Fungus (plural: fungi): an organism that is neither plant nor animal and feeds on/decomposes organic matter. Kingdom Fungi includes yeasts, molds, and mushrooms.

Mycology: the study of fungi.

Outcast: one that is pushed out, dismissed, or refused acceptance. *Mary Banning chose this word to describe her fungal friends because at the time, few scientists believed mushrooms were worthy of serious study.*

Did you know?

Mary Banning was way ahead of her time—the field of mycology has mushroomed since she completed *Fungi of Maryland!* Check out the mural at the back of the exhibit to discover more recent fungal findings.

Something to think about...

At the museum:

All the plants, animals, and fungi that we have discovered are given a “scientific name” often based on the Latin language. These names sometimes change as we learn more about new species. For example, the fungus that Mary Banning called *Polyporus versicolor* is now known as *Trametes versicolor*. Many species also have a “common name”—like a nickname—which is often inspired by how the organism looks. *Trametes versicolor* was eventually given the common name “turkey tail.” Can you see why?

In Mary Banning's day, so little was known about fungi that most did not have common names. Choose one of the illustrated mushrooms featured in the exhibit. Write down its scientific name—which can be found on the labels next to the illustration—and then invent your own common name for it.

Scientific name: _____

Your common name: _____

At home:

Search for mushrooms in your neighborhood!

- Mushrooms are more likely to be encountered in late summer and early fall, especially after a rainy day.
- Observe carefully, and be mindful about unnecessarily damaging the mushrooms and never eat any mushrooms you find in nature. (Beautiful—and edible—mushrooms can also be found any time of year at the grocery store!)

