

# The Augusta Chronicle

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## COLUMNS

# Campbell Vaughn: Stinking stinkhorns are popping up. Here's what you can do about it.

**Campbell Vaughn** Columnist

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With enough wood shaving to fill up the Grand Canyon around town, we are seeing some gross things popping up all over. These disgusting monsters rise out of the ground and smell comparable to the Walking Dead.

The stinkhorns have arrived, and it is enough to make one gag with the nauseous smell.

Stinkhorns are a type of mushroom from the Phallaceae family that arise in the landscape with their rancid stench. When the nights are a little cooler, the soil is moist and there is so much decaying material like roots and heavy wood mulch, these nasty fungi get my phone ringing.

Stinkhorns occur naturally and are spread by spores. As the mushrooms form, they are coated with a slime that smells as though every dog in the neighborhood has visited your flower bed three minutes before you step out into the yard.

These crazy looking fungi emerge from the ground and are covered in a putrid slime. The nasty smell attracts flies and when the pesky insects land on the oozy mushroom, the spores for the fungi attach to their feet and are off to be spread into nature.

If you can get past the smell, stinkhorn mushrooms are pretty cool to see. Varying in colors from bright orange, red, white, beige or olive, these mushrooms come in unique shapes as well. Some resemble an octopus or a webbed like hollowed mushroom or a horn.

And some of the varieties for the stinkhorns are quite clever as well with some with Halloween-themed names like dead man's fingers and lizard's claw. There are also some names of these mushrooms that are not appropriate for this weekly column.

**Campbell Vaughn:** Looking for a tough tree with bright colors? Try the Chinese pistachio

When these mushrooms develop, the immature fungi appear as an egg-shaped mass and then mature rapidly. They can grow 4 to 6 inches an hour and can generate enough force to break through asphalt.

Getting rid of the stinkhorns is a matter of getting a shovel and scooping them up and putting them into a trash can. If you can handle the smell, these mushrooms will go away in a couple of weeks or so. If they are in the shrub beds, covering them up with more mulch will just make more of them, so don't think you can get away with that trick.

Using pine and cypress mulch instead of regular hardwood mulch can help prevent stinkhorns because old pine and cypress don't decay as quickly, and decay is something that feeds fungi. Decaying matter will steal available nitrogen, so a little extra supplemental boost of 12-0-0 can be somewhat effective in preventing stinkhorns.

This trick has worked with some success for me over the years, but make sure to localize the nitrogen to the affected areas because we are trying to slow plant growth down not speed it up this time of year.