

## Giant Puffballs

*from Rosemary Royle*

I think one of the most dramatic of all fungi is the Giant Puffball. I had read about these before seeing them – I had a copy of “Food for Free” by Richard Mabey and so I knew what to look for and was exceptionally pleased to find one near our home in West Berkshire many years ago. We sliced it and fried it in bacon fat – it was truly delicious! And the lovely suede-y texture of the skin was delightful. Since then, we have seen a couple in the hedge near Maryborough Farm but that is all.



So I was intrigued to see a post on Tish Topics to the effect that one farmer has collected large numbers of Giant Puffballs and was offering them to all comers! I do hope they went to good homes! And I also hope that maybe a few were left alone in order to guarantee progeny in the years to come. Each Giant puffball has up to seven billion spores. I'll leave with a quote from Food for Free which says it all:

**Giant puffball** *Lycoperdon giganteum* [A]

**Pl. 1**

Not uncommon in woods, fields and under hedges. August to October. A large spherical fungus, 4" to 12" across, white, smooth and leathery initially, turning yellow to green when old. Grows apparently straight from the ground, with little or no stalk. Flesh solid, spongy, and pure white when young.

I think that if I had to choose my own favourite species from this book it would be the giant puffball. To come upon one of these suddenly is an astonishing experience, only rivalled by the taste of the first mouthful. There is not much point in searching deliberately for them; they are always unexpected, glinting like huge displaced eggs under a hedge or in the dark corner of a copse. If you are anything like me you will quickly strike up a strong affection for your ball, and cradle it back to be weighed and measured. It always seems sad to butcher the soft, kid-leather skin; but when you do, and cut through the flesh, the great flaky slabs of white meat that fall away are just as inviting.