

Stinkhorns: *Clathrus* sp.

Stinkhorns are a group of fungi that are prevalent in South Florida's climate. The area's abundant rainfall, high humidity, and warm temperatures throughout most of the year, not to mention a wealth of decaying plant material, provide the ideal environment for many different types of mushroom producing fungi.

There are several types of stinkhorn mushrooms in South Florida. They first develop underground until maturity. Then a mushroom-like structure, the size of a golf ball emerges from the ground. This strange mushroom is the "flower" of the fungus. Firmly attached to the ground, it grows quickly in size. Bright pink to orange in color and with the consistency of bubble gum, the stinkhorn is covered with a slimy mass of foul-smelling green to brown spores. The spores are the "seeds" for the development of the next generation of stinkhorn. All species of stinkhorns possess a foul odor. Flies and other insects are attracted to the odor. They feed on the matured mass thereby spreading the spores. According to one gardener, "stinkhorns look like coral, stink like a dead animal, and are soft to the touch." Another describes it as "bright pink, green and black with a shell-like substance attached to it."

Stinkhorns are actually beneficial to our environment. Spores that are transported to or drift onto dead wood, mulch, or other non-living organic matter develop into saprophytic fungi. The fungi feed on the cellulose in the materials thereby decomposing organic matter.

There are a few ways to rid a garden of stinkhorns. Remove the organic substrate; dig the submerged portions of the stinkhorn out of the soil, put them in a Ziploc bag, and discard them. There is usually no need to apply a fungicide for control. However, a drench that control dollar spot or other fungal lawn diseases should help to manage stinkhorns.



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Three pictures of *Clathrus ruber*, stinkhorn, growing in Lee County, Florida, soils in June and August.