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Polyporus betulinus

[Synonyms : *Boletus betulinus*, *Boletus suberosus*, *Piptoporus betulinus*]

BIRCH BRACKET is a fungus. Native to Europe (including Britain) it has wide hoof- or shell-shaped, faintly concentrically circled, chalky-white beneath, grey or very pale brown body.

It is also known as Birch polypore, *Björkticka* (Swedish), *Knivkjuker* (Norwegian), *Pökkelökääpä* (Finnish), and Razor strop fungus.

This fungus gradually enters the tree and leads to the wood's decay and ultimately the death of its sapwood over a period of about 40 years.

Betulinus is derived from the genus name *Betula* meaning 'birch-like'.

Referred to in the common name Razor strop fungus and the Norwegian name, *knivkjuker*, strips of older fruit bodies have been used as strops for sharpening razors.

Although authorities have not been able to identify its purpose then, their examination of a 1,000 year old 'Iceman' found in Europe led to the discovery that his travel pouch contained, amongst other things, this fungus.

According to some records the Swiss are said to have used wood which has been attacked by birch bracket for burnishing watches. On the other hand other records describe how fine mealy fragments or strips of the fungus' flesh itself have also been used by clockmakers for this purpose – as well as serving as tinder, as an absorbent material or (even today) by entomologists for mounting specimens of small insects for display.

Medicinally, it has long been used in Chinese medicine (some of their records dating back to 100-200 confirm this).