

Introduced by Representatives Bos-Lun of Westminster, Berbeco of Winooski, Brumsted of Shelburne, Coffey of Guilford, Cole of Hartford, Dodge of Essex, Farlice-Rubio of Barnet, Goldman of Rockingham, Labor of Morgan, Page of Newport City, Priestley of Bradford, Stebbins of Burlington, and Waters Evans of Charlotte.



*Hericium americanum*\_ Copyright Jenna Antonino DiMare, Mushroom Forager LLC

## Why a State Mushroom?

Vermont already has a State Bird (hermit thrush), a State Vegetable (Gilfeather turnip), and other widely appreciated State symbols – designating a State Mushroom would complement this strong foundation and extend recognition of our State’s unique natural heritage to the vast and diverse kingdom of fungi. Wild mushrooms are fascinating in form and function – these integral parts of Vermont’s fields and forests that play a critical role in nutrient cycling and soil health. Fostering broad appreciation of our iconic Green Mountain landscape, from fungi to flora to fauna, supports nature literacy, environmental education, and tourism opportunities.

**The Story** - Representative Bos-Lun, of Westminster, successfully engaged with students at Compass Middle School and Windham Elementary School, making visits to their classrooms to explain the idea of a State Mushroom and hear their feedback. All students at both schools considered and voted on which mushroom to move forward with, and bear’s head tooth won by a large margin. This process fostered environmental education, robust discussion, and an understanding of civics and the legislative process. The students wanted to select a species with culinary and medicinal value and appreciated that Vermont would join just five other states that already have State Mushrooms. The students were excited about the prospect of their selection becoming an official symbol of Vermont. “We are grateful these young Vermonters have taken on this project”, says Anson Tebbetts, Vermont Secretary of Agriculture, Food & Markets. “This is a great example of democracy in action. It also highlights how Vermonters can enjoy our beautiful working landscape while enjoying locally grown food.”

## Why Bear’s Head Tooth for State Mushroom?

This mushroom was selected by elementary and middle school students in Windham County, who appreciated its edibility and charm. Bear’s head tooth is a hardy, versatile, and resilient, and nutritious edible mushroom, that we are grateful to have in our Vermont forests. Instead of having gills or pores for spore distribution, bear’s head tooth is composed of ‘teeth’, or spines, that can resemble a frozen waterfall, providing a glimpse of winter in summer and fall. While no wild mushroom is foolproof to identify in the wild, the presence of these downward-pointing teeth adds to the distinctiveness and charisma of this choice edible. For Vermont mushroom enthusiasts, this is one of the most rewarding species to learn to identify or cultivate in your kitchen or shaded backyard. Its aroma is subtle but clean and refreshing, like crisp Green Mountain air.



## What is Bear’s Head Tooth, and Where is it Found in Vermont?

Bear’s head tooth (*Hericium americanum*) is a beautiful and delicious mushroom that is a hardy denizen of Vermont hardwood forests, favoring beech but also cultivated on sugar maple, poplar, and birch. It thrives in cool, moist weather and fruits most prolifically in late summer through fall [and rarely, in spring]. September and early October rains often summon impressive flushes of this species statewide – it can be abundant to the trained eye when the timing is right. This robust and resilient native mushroom is a decomposer of wood, returning nutrients to the soil, and can be found on standing hardwoods or downed logs. In addition to illuminating Vermont forests with its pearly teeth and standout flavor when cooked, it can be grown indoors or outdoors by home cultivators or local commercial growers.