

**Elegant Stinkhorn** – What a surprise! Visit your garden and see this ominous, stinky, weird looking mushroom (Figure 1). Alarming? It could be. Until you know what it is....this mushroom is the fruiting body of *Mutinus elegans*, a fungus commonly known as the elegant stinkhorn, the headless stinkhorn, or the devil's dipstick (*Mutinus caninus*, the dog stinkhorn, is a very similar species). Colorful? Yes, in both appearance and name! This saprophyte is harmless to plants, but can be a shocking discovery in your garden. This fungus is typically found growing on the ground by itself or in small groups on woody debris or leaf litter, during summer and fall. It likes rich soils and plenty of moisture. In North America, it is most common east of the Rocky Mountains, but is occasionally found in the Western U.S.



Figure 1. Elegant stinkhorn fruiting body found in a yard in Mesilla Park, NM (Photo: Kathryn Post)



Figure 2. *Mutinus elegans* (Photo: David Dennis, NAMA, [www.fcps.edu](http://www.fcps.edu))

The fruiting body begins its development in an "egg" form, resembling a “puffball” partially submerged in the ground (Figure 2). As the fruiting body matures, a slender orange to pink colored stalk emerges that tapers evenly to a pointed tip. The stalk is covered with a foul-smelling slimy green spore mass on the upper third of its length.

Insects, particularly flies, feed upon the slime which contains the spores (Figure 3). The spores adhere to the insect’s body and the insect serves as a vector (disseminating agent) to move spores from one location to another.



Figure 3. Flies feeding on the fruiting body of *Mutinus caninus* (Photo: Roland E. Barth, [www.fnaturesearch.org](http://www.fnaturesearch.org))

Due to their repellent odor, mature specimens are not edible. In the laboratory, *Mutinus elegans* has been shown to inhibit the growth of several microorganisms that can be pathogenic to humans.

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