

Bracket Fungus — Quhmaq

QUHMAT NAUTARTUT NAPANI. – BRACKET FUNGI GROW ON TREES.



Photo: An Alaskan tinder conk bracket fungus.

Fungi are among the most common organisms on Earth and they are found everywhere—in the ground, in the air, in water, and even inside people and animals. The fungus kingdom includes well-known organisms like mushrooms, molds, and yeasts, and less familiar organisms like jelly fungus, smuts, and rusts.

Bracket fungi are a distinctive group of hard, woody fungi that grow on trees, stumps, and fallen logs. Also known as conks or shelf fungi, they lack a stem and grow conspicuous, semi-circular caps on tree trunks and branches—like shelves. They are particularly common in damp forests where they contribute to the decomposition of wood. There are many species of bracket fungus in Alaska. They often grow on birch trees but can be found on cottonwood, willow, alder, spruce, poplar, and aspen.

Although bracket fungi are tough and inedible, they have many uses. Alaska Native people use them for medicine, to start fires and carry embers, and to enhance the effects of tobacco. Bracket fungi are among the many ingredients Alutiiq people use to prepare *iqmik* or chewing tobacco. People burn the fungi and add the ashes to tobacco to enhance its potency. Other people collect and dry bracket fungi and use them as canvases for small paintings.