

Collecting and Eating Wild Mushrooms*

Learning to find and enjoy wild mushrooms is satisfying on many levels. You must exercise caution as there are many species that, when eaten, cause various levels of discomfort. Some contain potent toxins causing permanent organ damage, or even death. For your safety and enjoyment, please follow these guidelines, and remember “When in doubt, throw it out!”

Every mushroom you plan to eat must be ACCURATELY IDENTIFIED as an edible species.

There are no simple guidelines that separate edibles from other species. Identify all wild mushrooms you collect to eat with 100% confidence. Many edible species have toxic look-alikes. Learn what these are, and don't rely only on photographs or drawings. Don't mix edible and non-edible species in your collecting basket.

Never eat raw wild fungi.

Thorough cooking can improve digestibility, flavor, available nutrition and the elimination of some potentially harmful substances. However, cooking does not eliminate all types of toxins and does not make poisonous mushrooms edible.

When trying a species for the first time, eat only two cooked teaspoons of only one species, and wait at least 24 hours before eating any more.

A few people have an allergy to a particular mushroom species, just as some people are allergic to shrimp, wheat, dairy, or other foods. Sample only one at a time (one per day maximum). Keep a whole, uncooked sample of the mushroom in your refrigerator in case the identification needs to be confirmed later.

Do not consume alcohol when trying a new species.

Wait until you are sure you are not allergic to a particular species before having it with liquor, wine, or beer. The presence of alcohol may produce a stronger allergic reaction. One species of the genus *Coprinus* (Inky Caps) reacts with alcohol resulting in uncomfortable symptoms. Before eating any, learn to identify the one that causes this reaction (*Coprinus atramentarius*).

Only eat fresh mushrooms.

You wouldn't eat moldy or rotting produce from the grocery store -- the same holds true for wild mushrooms.

Be aware of where you collect your edibles.

Mushrooms can readily pick up chemicals from the environment. Never consume fungi from a lawn where fertilizers or pesticides might have been applied. Avoid collecting along busy roads or anywhere near old dump sites. Do not eat fungi growing on ornamental trees. Toxins in the wood may be incorporated into the fungal tissue.

Susceptible people

Don't serve wild fungi to young children, old, or sick people. Their resistance may be lower. Same for those who don't want to eat them -- fear can make people sick.

Having an understanding and appreciation of the variety and beauty that surrounds us in the fungal world will enrich your diet and your life. ENJOY!

* These guidelines are adapted from those prepared by the Cascade Mycological Society