

Edible and Poisonous Mushrooms.

Mushrooms, which belong to a group of plants known as fungi, have been used as an article of food for hundreds of years. To the epicures of all countries these delicate plants are in demand because of their delightful woodland flavor. In China and European countries they are gathered by the poorer classes. Although these people have learned by experience to tell the difference between the common edible and poisonous forms, deaths among them from mushroom poisoning are frequent. Even in the United States it is estimated that about 100 people die each year from mushroom poisoning.

In order that the public may know the distinctions between the edible and the poisonous species, a botanist of the Smithsonian Institution makes the following statement:

The popular terms "mushrooms" and "toadstools" are valueless when one attempts to differentiate between these two types of fungi. There are also a number of so-called tests which are absolutely unreliable. Each kind grows on lawns, in open fields and in the woods. The saying that a mushroom is edible because it is found in an open field is, therefore, not to be relied upon; nor can reliance be placed upon tests based on odor or taste. Some of our most poisonous forms have both excellent mushroom-like odors and tastes. Color, by itself, is no indication, for there are poisonous and edible forms which are white or gray or of various other shades. Neither is peeling a test for edible forms, as some of the most poisonous kinds peel easily.

Recently a member of the staff of the United States National Museum came upon a group of several people gathering one of the most poisonous species of the mushroom, growing near a summer seashore resort in a wood in which is a popular picnic ground. This form is very enticing because of its beautiful symmetrical shape and its snow white color. It is called the "destroying angel" and if eaten is a deadly poison. There is no antidote for it—death is sure to follow.

There is only one way of distinguishing between edible and poisonous mushrooms, and that is by knowing and being able to recognize the botanical characteristics which the various forms possess. Briefly these characteristics may be summed up as follows: The part of the mushroom which we see is but the "fruit" of a plant that grows on dead organic matter, either in the ground or in part of trees. This plant which has been growing below the surface of the soil for a long time, in some cases for years, consists of fine network of very delicate threads, having the appearance of a compact cobweb. Ordinarily the portion of the fungus in the earth is not observed; when fruiting time comes, however, this cobwebby

structure sends out a small rounded egg-like body, known as the button. The button grows rapidly and soon bursts, revealing a small cap-like portion borne upon a stem. It is this cap and stem which constitute most of the so-called mushrooms. As the cap and stem enlarge and grow upward, portions of the button-shedding the cap, giving the cap a warty appearance, or they may pass away. The lower half of the sheath may disappear or may remain in the form of a cup around the base of the stem. The presence or absence of this cup, known botanically as a volva, is an important feature in identification, for some of the most poisonous forms possess this structure. At first the margin of the cap is attached to the stem by a connecting membrane which readily ruptures, revealing the gills on the under side of the cap. Portions of the membrane may remain on the stem in the form of a ring and the outer portions may remain attached to the edge of the cap. The presence or absence of this ring on the stem is another important distinguishing feature. These characteristics together with the color of the spores (minute bodies which, like seeds, propagate new plants) borne upon the gills, make up the most important features which enable one to judge with certainty the edible quality. All mushrooms which possess a volva at the base of the stem and a ring on the upper portion of the stem, should be rejected. When collecting mushrooms it is necessary to dig up the base of the stem together with the main body, otherwise the volva may be overlooked.

The common field mushroom possesses pink gills, which turn black with age and a ring around the upper part of the stem, but has no volva or cup at its base. This is the principal mushroom grown commercially, and, when properly prepared, is indeed a delicacy. It is found in open fields from August to October and may be recognized by its pink gills, the gray shiny cover of the cap and stem, and by the other characteristics just mentioned. All puff balls which are young and possessing white flesh are also edible. The common morel or sponge mushroom possesses excellent eating quality and may easily be recognized. It has a much furrowed and wrinkled conical top, which is borne on a more or less elongated stem. There are no true gills, the spores being borne on the irregular pitted heads. When fresh these tops appear yellowish and are borne on a white stem. The morel is usually found growing in the woods in the spring of the year.

The coral mushroom is another edible one easy to recognize. The top is, in this case, made up of a much bleached, coral-like structure of a white or yellow color. It is found growing on decayed logs or on the ground in shady places and, if obtained when fresh and of a good odor and taste, makes a very fine dish. Those who are acquainted with the shaggy-man, the two species of "ink-cap," the sulphur-colored polypore and the oyster mushroom, need not hesitate to use them.

The Outlook for \$30 Shoes.

The shoe manufacturer, who at the banquet of the Boot and Shoe Club, last week, predicted the price of \$30 for an all-leather shoe "in a few years" is probably not altogether an idle alarmist. More people to be shoe, fewer cattle and horses to supply them with leather and less diminishing gold supplies and less diminishing purchasing power in the dollar; what else can we expect than to have to pay more for shoes? The

shoemaker no longer pegs his shoes, but he continues to peg up the price. Leather is already a luxury. But in the remarks of Mr. Donovan, who uttered his \$30 warning, we may find some small encouragement. This is to be the price of shoes "made entirely of high-grade leather." There may be nothing like leather, but there are other things in the world. We may yet be wearing beautiful shoes made of wood pulp or of old rubber mixed with cotton waste. The ingenuity of man is not yet exhausted.—Boston Transcript.

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