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100 Edible Mushrooms

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Introduction

I love mushrooms. When I see one in the woods, I drop to the ground to admire it. When I see one from the car, I slam on the brakes. I can spend hours crawling around on hands and knees in my yard while my neighbors shake their heads. I touch them, sniff them, draw them, take their pictures, make them the stars of home movies, study them, put them under my microscope, dry them, keep them in my living room, give presentations about them, write books about them—and sometimes I eat them.

Most of the best meals I've eaten in my life included wild mushrooms. A creamy sauce of chanterelles (p. 139) over toast in an Italian restaurant in Durango, Colorado (see chef Vincent Ferraro's recipe on p. 305); veal cutlets with porcini (p. 32) in the Italian Alps; ravioli made from scratch and stuffed with *Boletus pallidus* (p. 129; recipe on p. 307); a mess of sautéed yellow morels (p. 87) over steaks . . . my taste buds think of these as the high points of my life.

But the truth is (and I want you to know this right away), I don't eat a lot of wild mushrooms. About once a month I cook up some fresh or dried morels, chanterelles, or porcini, but that's about it. For one thing, wild mushrooms scare me. Even when I am 100 percent sure of a



Hericium erinaceus (edible; p. 102)

mushroom's identity and the species has been eaten safely by thousands of people, my intellect has trouble communicating the certainty to the rest of me. The two times I have suffered from relatively minor mushroom poisoning ("gastrointestinal distress" is a nice euphemism for the symptoms), it was not pleasant. Once, I had correctly identified and eaten a mushroom (an orange-capped *Leccinum*; see p. 55) that, at the time, was widely reported as a safe edible. The other time, I ate *blueberries* that I had stupidly not washed after I had coated them with spore dust from poisonous puffballs (*Scleroderma citrinum*; see pp. 96–98) in the woods, stomping on them again and again like a madman in order to show a friend how they dispersed their spores.

So my goal with this book is only partly to give you the means to collect and cook up edible wild mushrooms. The bigger goal is to get you *interested* in mushrooms—edible or not. They are so fascinating, and so little is known about them! If you love the woods, as I do, think about this: the forest would not be there without mushrooms. The trees and woody plants require mushrooms for survival (see the Focus Point "Mycorrhizal Mushrooms," p. 108). Stumps and fallen logs would never rot away (see "Wood-Rotting Parasites and Saprobies," p. 82). Dead leaves and needles would pile up until the forest choked on its own debris (see "Litter-Decomposing Saprobies," p. 257). Instead of tilting as a result of the activity of a gazillion generations of enterprising earthworms, that tower in Pisa would be engulfed by dead grass that never decomposed (see "Grass-Loving Saprobies," p. 93). The fungi are integral to life on earth, and mushrooms deserve our respect and admiration!

Yeah, okay—not quite a Vince Lombardi halftime speech and definitely not Prince Hal's "We few, we happy few, we band of brothers" the night before battle. Maybe you just want to find some edible mushrooms and enjoy a good meal—you have, after all, purchased a book called *100 Edible Mushrooms*, not *Mushrooms Will Save the Planet*. So I have some good news for you and a little piece of bad news.

First, the good news. I have asked two mushroom experts who are also experts on *eating* mushrooms to help me out. John David Moore has written most of the "In the Woods" and "In the Kitchen" entries in the book, as well as some material in the section "Collecting, Preparing, and Eating Wild Mushrooms." John David introduced me to the world of mushrooms, many years ago, and we have been collecting mushrooms together ever since. This guy knows his mushrooms—and he can cook like nobody's business. Darwin DeShazer is scientific advisor for the Sonoma County Mycological Association. He can identify just about any mushroom you put in front of him in about two seconds, and he is also a wonderful cook; he has written the entries on picking and cook-

ing western mushrooms. Shannon Stevens and Ken Gilberg of the Missouri Mycological Society have helped with some rarely eaten mushrooms, as has my wife, Kate Klipp.

The further good news is that there are well over 100 edible mushrooms included in these pages. Many of the individual entries actually represent two, three, a dozen, or even more species as they are currently defined by mycologists. *Hundreds of Edible Mushrooms*, however, wouldn't have made for a catchy title.

The bad news is that while there are indeed hundreds of edible mushrooms in North America there are not 100 *good* edible mushrooms. We were definitely scraping the bottoms of the edibility and palatability barrels to come up with 100 entries. If you want to eat the devil's urn (p. 94) or pickled stinkhorn eggs (p. 197), have at it, by all means. But don't say I didn't warn you!