

A WORD ON MUSHROOMS

It is mushroom time again. After a few cool nights and moist days these magical shapes and colours sprout from the ground in woods and fields. But which ones are good to eat you ask and which ones are poisonous? Of the many thousands of kinds only a few are deadly poisonous, some will make you sick, most are not poisonous but don't taste particularly good and a few are quite delectable. To help you through the haze of the mushroom world..

1. Buy a good field guide, there are several available but for my money Orson K. Miller's Mushrooms of North America is the best. The soft cover edition is sturdy enough for field use. Take time to read the introductory sections on identification before you become mesmerised by the superb colour plates.
2. Collect mushrooms in an open basket or fruit box rather than a plastic bag where they will quickly deteriorate and get crushed. Don't mix edible and poisonous species.
3. Collect only young clean specimens and eat them as soon as possible after picking. Old worm-eaten mushrooms of even the most delicious types are not good to eat.
4. Don't eat any mushroom that has pure white gills, it could be the destroying angel, Amanita virosa. The first bite will kill you!
5. Don't eat anything if you are not sure of its identification.
6. Ignore all the folk tales on how to tell whether a mushroom is poisonous or not.

With these guidelines in mind and your field guide in hand go out this fall and search for

those wild feasts. Below is a list of delicious mushrooms frequently found on the Island, which you should have no trouble identifying.

Chanterelles (Cantherellus cibarius), an orange funnel-shaped mushroom found under softwood and in spruce hedges.

Field mushrooms (Agaricus caripestris), a white mushroom with pink gills found in pastures.

Small spiny puffballs (Lycoperdon perlature), eat these only when they are young and white inside.

Shaggy manes (Coprinus comatus), here is an exception to rule number 4. This mushroom has white gills but they turn grey then black and inky with age. With its conical shape and shaggy cap this one cannot be mistaken for a destroying angel. They are found on lawns and manure heaps.

Lactanus deliciosus, as the name suggests, is a delicious carrot coloured mushroom with green staining latex, found under young spruce trees.

Happy foraging.

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