



Extension FactSheet

Plant Pathology, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1087

Wild Mushrooms

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There are 2,000 or more kinds of wild mushrooms in Ohio. Some are poisonous and some are edible and delicious when properly prepared. The edibility of the majority is either not known or they are not considered for food because of their small size or poor flavor or texture.

Even though not every one is interested in collecting mushrooms to eat, it is important to understand most have an important and beneficial role in the environment. They grow in a wide variety of habitats. Most of the mushrooms seen on a walk through a woods are beneficial. Many species are quite specific about their food source and will be found only under or near certain kinds of trees—some under pines, others under oak, etc. Some are important as decay organisms, aiding in the breakdown of logs, leaves, stems and other organic debris. This important role of mushrooms results in recycling of essential nutrients. Some mushrooms grow in, and form their fruiting structures on living trees causing decay of the sapwood or of the heartwood. Many woodland mushrooms are essential to good growth, and even survival of trees. They establish a relationship with roots of living trees that is mutually beneficial. These are called *mycorrhizal* mushrooms.



Figure 1. Chanterelle (*Cantharellus*) is bright yellow to orange and found from June to September under hardwood trees, especially oak. It is edible and choice—be aware of look-a-likes.



Figure 2. Giant Puffball (*Calvatia*) Edible. It ranges in diameter from 8 to 24 inches and is found in parks, meadows, pastures, open woods, urban areas, late August to early October.

All mushrooms, whether poisonous or edible can be admired for their beauty and the fantastic variety of form, color and texture.

Which Mushrooms are Safe to Eat?

Some edible mushrooms are very similar in appearance to poisonous kinds and may grow in the same habitat. Edible mushrooms are known to be safe to eat because they have been eaten frequently with no ill effects. Poisonous mushrooms are known because someone ate them and became ill or died. **There is no test or characteristic to distinguish edible from poisonous mushrooms.** This indicates a need to identify with certainty one of several of the proven edible species and pick and eat only those positively identified. At the same time, you should also learn to identify some of the common poisonous mushrooms, especially those that are similar to edible kinds. It is especially important to learn the characteristics of the *Amanita* mushrooms, since several of the species common in Ohio are poisonous, a few causing serious illness and sometimes death.

The word “toadstool” is often used to indicate a poisonous mushroom. Since there is **no** way to distinguish between a so-

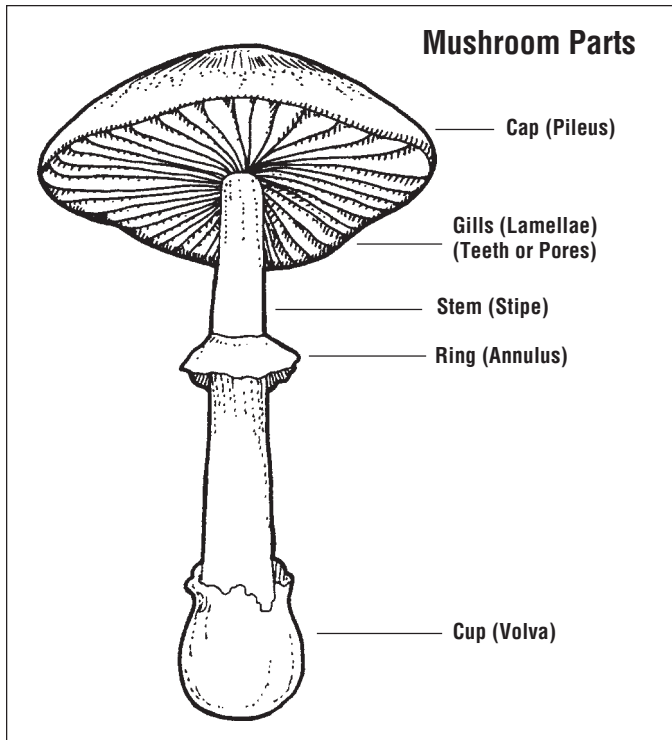


Figure 3. Shaggy mane (*Coprinus*). One of the inky caps. Late summer to fall in grassy areas and hard-packed ground. Edible. Gills and cap soon become inky.

called “toadstool” and an edible mushroom it is more precise to speak of poisonous mushrooms or edible mushrooms.

The season for collecting wild mushrooms in Ohio for food begins in late March and early April when the first *morel* or *sponge mushrooms* are found. These choice edible mushrooms are most abundant during April and the first two weeks of May. The *false morels* (members of the *Gyromitra* genus) are found at this same time of the year, but they must be regarded as poisonous and not collected for eating. It is true that many have eaten false morels with no apparent ill effects. However, recent research has shown toxins to be present in some of the false morels that can cause death or serious illness. Do not eat the false morels.

From mid summer to late autumn, a great variety of mushrooms may be found in Ohio. A number of these are choice edibles. Photographs and brief descriptions of several of the more common mushrooms found in Ohio are included in this fact sheet.

Edible vs. Poisonous—True or False

- Poisonous mushrooms tarnish a silver spoon. **False**
- If it peels, you can eat it. **False**
- All mushrooms growing on wood are edible. **False**
- Mushrooms that squirrels or other animals eat are safe for humans. **False**
- All mushrooms in meadows and pastures are safe to eat. **False**
- All white mushrooms are safe. **False** (In Ohio, the most common “deadly” mushrooms are white.)
- Poisonous mushrooms can be detoxified by parboiling, drying or pickling. **False**



Figure 4. Green-spored *Lepiota*. (*Chlorophyllum*). Caps large, up to 10 inches. In lawns and other grassy areas. Gray-green spore print. Late summer and early fall. Poisonous.



Figure 5. Fly *Amanita*. Reddish-orange, orange to yellow caps with whitish “warts.” Poisonous. Under trees.



Figure 6. Morel mushroom (*Morchella*). Three species in Ohio late March to mid May. Edible.



Figure 7. Meadow mushroom (*Agaricus*). In grassy areas, late summer and early fall. Pink gills, becoming chocolate brown. Edible.



Figure 8. Russula mushroom (*Russula sp.*). Many species in Ohio of various colors—green, yellow, orange, purple, red, white, etc. All woodland and mycorrhizal. Some edible and some poisonous. Summer and fall. Brittle in texture, especially the gills.



Figure 9. Sulfur or Chicken mushroom (*Laetiporus*). Orange-yellow with pores. On wood, edible especially the tender edges. Summer and fall.



Figure 10. A false morel (*Gyromitra sp.*). Do not eat false morels. April and May.



Figure 11. Jack-O-Lantern mushroom. (*Omphalotus, Clitocybe*). Orange-yellow with gills. Base of stumps, decaying tree roots. Poisonous.



Figure 12. Slippery jack (*Suillus, Boletus*). A fleshy pore mushroom. Under 2- and 3-needle pines. Edible.



Figure 13. Smooth white *Lepiota*. Grassy areas, late summer to early autumn. Edible for most people. Be aware of look-a-likes.



Figure 14. Destroying Angel (*Amanita sp.*). Three, all white similar species, common in Ohio in mixed woods. Found July to October. Poisonous, deadly.

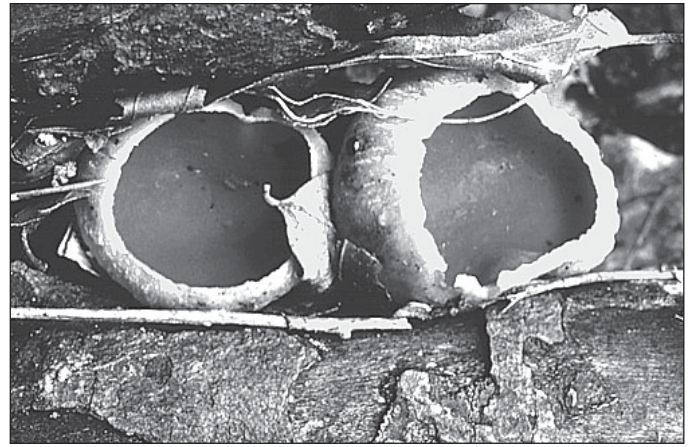


Figure 15. Scarlet cup. One to two inch cup or saucer shaped mushroom. On fallen hardwood branches. March–April. A beautiful early mushroom.



Figure 16. American *Lepiota*. Summer and fall. On wood in advanced stages of decay, sawdust—wood may be buried.



Figure 17. *Lactarius* or milk mushroom. One of many woodland species—some edible, some not. All are mycorrhizal. A latex (white or colored) exudes from injured areas. Summer and fall.



Figure 18. A cup mushroom (*Peziza*).

Collecting Wild Mushrooms

- Be sure of your identification—eat only kinds known to be edible.
- Do not eat mushrooms raw.
- Eat only mushrooms in good condition.
- Eat only one kind at a time and do not eat large amounts.
- Eat only a small amount the first time; even morels, generally considered to be excellent, may cause illness in some persons.
- Don't experiment. There is an old saying, **“There are old mushroom hunters, and bold mushroom hunters, but there are no old, bold mushroom hunters.”**
- Obtain a copy of one or more books or publications on mushrooms and/or join a mushroom club.

Sources of Information

Books

Field Guide to Mushrooms of North America by Kent & Vera McKnight. 429 p. and 48 pl. (A Peterson guide) Houghton Mifflin Co. 500 species described and illustrated in color. Another 500 discussed.

Mushrooms of North America by O. K. Miler. E. P. Dutton and Co. Over 400 species described; 292 color photographs; illustrated glossary.

Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Mushrooms by Gary Lincoff. Alfred A. Knopf. 926 p. 756 color photographs with descriptions of all species.

The Mushroom Hunter's Field Guide by A. H. Smith and Nancy Weber. Univ. of Mich Press. 316 p. and 282 color photographs.

The authors of the above guides are professional mycologists. These guides are often available in local bookstores or in public libraries.

Clubs

Kenneth Cochran
North American Mycological Association
3556 Oakwood
Ann Arbor, MI 48104

Mr. Walter Sturgeon
Ohio Mushroom Society
288 E. North Avenue
East Palestine, OH 44413

Contact the above for more information. The membership dues are nominal. Newsletters are issued several times a year—and field trips, forays and workshops are scheduled. These clubs are for anyone interested in any aspect of mushrooms. Both have professional mycologists to help identify mushrooms and lead field trips.

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