

EARTHSTAR

E X A M I N E R

Number 17, November 1990

Newsletter of the Missouri Mycological Society

First Annual MMS Overnight by Ken Gilberg

About a dozen members of the MMS came to our first (Annual?) overnight October 6 and 7. For those of you who wanted to come but for some reason couldn't, I'm sorry. Let me tell you what you missed.

It had rained on the Wednesday before the big weekend. Anticipation of bountiful baskets of boletes and other basidiomycetes was bouncing about in my brain.

The site of the overnight was a remote private retreat and residence of two members of our club, Marty and Jack Toll. Their handsome hand-crafted home sits in an old Ozark woodland on a bluff overlooking a bend in the Jack's Fork River. They neighbor the National Scenic Riverways and other natural areas. The forest is mixed hardwoods and pine, its floor a dense leaf litter with occasional boulders encrusted with blue-green lichen.

Our hosts were excellent guides to the wildlife of the area. Jack was born nearby and had made his profession as a wildlife manager. He had managed Swan Lake and Mingo Swamp Natural Areas. His hunting and fishing skills were everywhere apparent -- from the turkey feet and deer antlers nailed to the wall of the house to the pickled sucker fish that we all enjoyed as an appetizer. Living off the land seems to be a lifelong challenge and source of enjoyment for both Tolls, mushrooms being another aspect of their quest. Jack had just reread *The Grapes of Wrath*. The story moved him, reminding him of his youth and his family's life and energy during the Depression's hard times. Like many Ozark families, he learned to harvest much from the wild. He was celebrating a personal thanksgiving, appreciating how good we actually have it now. And speaking of how good we have it now, you should have tasted the succulently delicious pork loin that Jack had smoked for our Saturday night dinner.

Marty Toll, strikingly attractive and vivacious, was the most gracious hostess imaginable. Everyone felt entirely at home. When not sub-

stitute teaching, Marty tends her marvelous gardens, filled with vegetables, herbs and colorful flowers. She baked breads and blackberry cobbler for us and made a hearty vegetable soup Friday night. Most of the ingredients were from the garden. Marty's full larder in the cellar was stocked with pickled and canned vegetables, including mushrooms, deer soup, jams, jellies and more. She is wonderful.

The Tolls had prepared for our coming by airing and preparing their campers and pop-ups, cleaning the little log house with a sleeping loft, and finishing their downstairs bathroom for our use.

What about the mushrooms we found? The first mushroom was found and picked by the first car that past it in the Toll's driveway. Jack and Marty had taken bets on who'd pick it first. It was a massive jack o' lantern. Almost everyone who passed it picked some. Friday night we gathered around and watched it glow in the darkness.

On Saturday we went out foraging to different areas nearby. Jack's son, Lee, and Lee's two teenagers, Jeremy and Jennifer, joined enthusiastically in the search.

Perhaps our total species list isn't all that impressive and maybe we didn't collect our main course for dinner, but we found some gorgeous specimens that inspired awe of the fungal world. Pink corals, a *Gomphus*(?) shaped like a calla lily, a pearl white mushroom that stained vivid yellow on bruising; a fringed *Pholiota* with colors that would fascinate colorists Rothko or Albers, contrasting a deep yellowish-green with a rich reddish-purple. Species found include: *Lepiota procera*, *Amanita vaginata*, *Laccaria ochropurea*, *Psuedohydnum gelatinosum*, *Hericium erinaceus*, *Cortinarius alboviolaceus*, *Cantharellus cinnabarinus*, *Clitocybe odora*, *Agaricus haemorrhoidarius* or *silvaticus*, *Omphalotus oli-varius*, *Polyporus radicans*, *Pisolithus tinctorius*, *Sparasis crispa*, *Gomphus* sp.

I believe that everyone had a great time that weekend. It was an intimate sized group and everyone contributed to the good time. Larry

Hazelip had someone to talk to who loved hunting and fishing as much as he did. Carol Hazelip was terrifically warm and pleasant. She baked a tasty vegetable casserole and chocolate chip cookies that Larry ate with his beer. Don Dill was having fun and laughed a great deal. He loved adding to his already extensive knowledge of mushrooms, fishing and lore of the woods.

Erika Petke, a new member who learned about mushrooms in her native Germany, is a great addition to our club. She is studying English at St. Louis University. She truly appreciates America's natural bounty. In Germany, some mushrooms are nearly extinct from over-picking and many mushrooms have been contaminated by radioactive debris from Chernobyl. This was her first time camping out and she loved it. She even overcame a lifelong terror of snakes. Phil kept the green vine snake Ron Dollarhite had caught at a comfortable distance from her. She felt safe with this group, she told me. Everyone enjoyed Erika's buttery *apfel kuchen* that she baked for Saturday's breakfast. Erika and Phil Roos worked on translating the French mushroom book together. Phil looked relaxed.

Deborah and Bryan Jones seemed happy in the honeymoon camper that was provided for them. Bryan is a willing accomplice to Deborah's enthusiasm for mushrooming. Ron Dollarhite and his two lovely daughters drove up from Reed's Spring. He brought the fresh mushrooms we would enjoy that weekend -- shiitake and sulphur shelf that he cultivates. Ron made a soup for everyone with the shiitake and some watercress he and Lee gathered nearby. The sulphur shelf was eaten as an appetizer and more shiitake found their way into scrambled eggs for Sunday's breakfast.

I don't want it to sound like all we did was eat. The walks were fun and the conversations were interesting and often dealt with a favorite subject of mine, mushrooming. The ambiance was as warm as the evening campfires.

Thanks again to Marty and Jack Toll for making us feel so welcomed. Our only hope is that they enjoyed themselves as much as the rest of us. To those of you who might enjoy a weekend like this: with any luck we'll do it again next year.

Dues are Due!

As most of you know, our fiscal year runs from November through October. If I get it right, your label will give you the message. For regular

members, dues are \$8.00 while for associate members dues are \$2.00. If your label says "DUES ARE DUE," please send me your check. You can be an associate member if you already belong to another local mushroom club or if you truly cannot afford our regular dues.

If you paid your MMS dues so late that they count for fiscal 1991, your label will not show a message.

NAMA dues are also due. In order to qualify for \$12.00 NAMA dues (\$3.00 off the regular price) you must send the check, made out to NAMA, to Phil Roos. All NAMA members need to renew except for Barbara O'Brien.

A few people (not including exchanges) receive the newsletter free. Your label says "RESPONSE REQUESTED." That means that you need to call or send me a postcard if you want to continue receiving the *Earthstar Examiner*. This is not a lot to ask. If I don't hear from you, I will assume that your copy is being thrown out unread and that we are wasting postage and duplication costs.

Ken suggests that our associate membership is too much of a bargain. This constitutes notice that a motion for an increase in the associate membership will be discussed and voted on during our brief business meeting at the winter gathering.

A Couple of Recipes by Ken Gilberg

I realize that you're probably not going to find these mushrooms anymore this year, but save your old *Earthstars* for harvest time.

***Grifola frondosus* in Insalata**

About five years ago, while foraging in a woods in Staten Island, I came across an older Italian man collecting honey mushrooms. He had a canvass sack full of them. But I had already taken my prize of a couple of beautiful hens of the wood. I showed them to him and he told me how to cook them. He said in Italian, he called them the "mama", I guess because they can be such big mothers. I was unsure if they were really as good as I remembered them until I was able to repeat the recipe this year with another *Grifola frondosus*.

Tear the mushroom up into florettes (it has a similar shape as a cauliflower). Throw away only the toughest part of the stalk. Parboil the mushroom for a few minutes. This will cook it mostly

and eliminate any bitterness. (The one I found this year was a little past perfect and it came out delicious).

Drain. Saute the mushroom in some good wine vinegar until it is absorbed by the mushroom pieces.

Transfer to a bowl and add extra virgin olive oil, some whole garlic cloves, chopped parsley, chopped celery, some green olives and salt and pepper. It's best the next day and would probably keep for quite a while if it wasn't so good.

Spaghetti with *Agaricus Campestris*

I adapted this slightly from my favorite cookbook, *More Classic Italian Cooking*, by Marcella Hazan. She uses the regular champignons from the store and enhances them with dried porcini. I used the delicious meadow mushroom whose nutty flavor needed no enhancement, just liberation.

1 1/2 pound (more or less) clean *Agaricus campestris* (Cut off their bottoms in the field and brush off at home)

1/2 cup chopped onion

1 stick of butter (Marcella made me do it)

salt

freshly ground pepper

3 Tbs. parsley chopped fine (Italian parsley is superior to the curly kind available in the stores)

1/2 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese, plus additional for the table.

Chop the mushrooms fine. Put the onions and half the butter into a saute pan and turn the heat on to medium. When the onions become colored a rich gold, put in the mushrooms. Add salt and pepper and cover the pan. Cook for 25 to 30 minutes. This may seem a lot longer than necessary, but it concentrates their flavor. If there is any water left after this time, boil the liquid away. Turn off the heat.

Cook the pasta *al dente*, drain. Toss immediately with the mushroom sauce, the rest of the butter, and the Parmesan. Serve with additional Parmesan on the side. Enjoy!

MUSHROOM MILESTONES

by Ken Gilberg

Yes, it is true that the more you know the more you know you don't know, but encouragingly, there are milestones in mushrooming that signal the passage to new levels of knowledge and involvement. Each level indicates a sort of graduation. We may not pass the same milestones in the same order or in the same time period, but we share many experiences on the mycological quest.

Interest and Awareness

This is the first step. Everyone has their own beginnings as a mushroomer. Living in New York City, hungry for nature and interested in the city's wildlife, I had read *Possum in the Parking Lot*. In the book, the author had promised a bounty of edibles and few poisonous species. I remember the pen and ink drawing of a fruit stand with mushrooms for sale and clump of edibles growing right by the tree in front! Thinking back, I doubt the mushrooms were edible. Mushrooms next to a tree in the city are apt to be stained yellow. Nevertheless, I began to believe that mushrooms could be found and eaten.

Buying your first field guide

In a rainy Fall about seven years ago, seeing so many fungi in the New Jersey Pine Barrens, I took out my little *Golden Guide to Non-Flowering Plants* and attempted to figure out what some of those natural beauties were. I couldn't identify a single one in the *Golden Guide* and realized that a more sophisticated book was necessary. I made a request of a friend who managed Scribners Book Store on Fifth Avenue and told him that it was a matter of life and death. He gave me the then recently released *Audubon Guide to North American Mushrooms*.

Eating your first self-identified wild mushroom

I thought it would take a year or so before I would know enough to risk eating any, but it took less than a week. Across from my home in Brooklyn, in the shadow of the World Trade Towers, was a large abandoned lot in which I would walk my new puppy. I found a tall, fuzzy white mushroom in abundance. I looked through every photo in the book twenty times, read dozens of descriptions and eventually decided it was what I thought it was, the shaggy mane, and with the thrill that a skier must feel as he pushes off from the highest mountain, I ate it.

Making your first mistake

Having found those first delicious shaggy manes and some oyster mushrooms by late Fall and pouring over the *Audubon Guide* all winter, by Spring I was overanxious for game. Yes, Lincoff does list look-alikes for many species, but how could he know when someone is as far off as I was? I failed to see or chose to ignore the stem on what I thought were more oysters that Spring. I ate a bunch of them, knowing somewhere in my mind that I wasn't a million percent sure because later I decided I should check them

out again. It turned out to be *Flamulina velutipes*. As I read that a look-alike to the velvet foot was the Deadly Galerina, I realized that I had taken a gun to my head for a game of Russian Roulette. I was stunned for several days. I imagined how put out my brother would be if I needed one of his kidneys.

On the second day I called New York Botanical Garden to talk to a mycologist. I made my confession, in tears, to an elderly man who reassured me of my growing knowledge and assured me everyone makes mistakes and that I should not quit.

Joining a club

After several years of learning on my own and eating quite a few varieties, I saw a display by the New Jersey Mycological Society at a nature center. At last I could spend time with others who shared my enthusiasm. (Zealots are difficult to take unless you happen to be of the same faith.) At forays, fungus fests and mycophagy sessions I was able to see and taste many more species that I had ever collected and learned to identify by folks far more knowledgeable than myself. However, I was glad that I had built my own foundation of knowledge at that point and could rely on myself for identification.

Expanding a mushroom library

One field guide, no matter how good, is not enough. Sometimes a drawing is better, sometimes a photo. Each book is laid out differently and there has not been one book in my collection, now numbering around forty, that I have not gained from - different species, different recipes, a better index, a more complete key, etc. *One Thousand American Fungi*, written by Charles McIlvaine and Robert Macadam, originally published in 1900 and available as a Dover reprint, is utterly fascinating though much is out of date. As aids to identification, I have gotten to the point where general guides have less and less to offer and am turning to monographs and technical books that read like a foreign language. Reading Moser's *Keys to Agarics and Boleti* might be another milestone in my mycological endeavors.

Getting beyond the conservatives Eating Amanita

In many books, such as the Peterson mushroom guide, the authors do not recommend eating mushrooms which other authors declare as edible, such as any *Amanita* species, the lobster mushroom, slippery jack, *Armillaria mellea*,

among others. It was a milestone for me when I ate, for the first time this year, the grisette, *Amanita vaginata*. I like what Arora says in *Mushrooms Demystified* in the section on *Amanita*:

"I for one do not subscribe to the wholesale philosophy (as expounded by many mushroom mentors) that *Amanitas* should not be eaten under any circumstances. In my humble fungal opinion, it is just as easy to overlook the volva and mistake a deadly *Amanita* for an edible mushroom of another genus as to mistake a deadly *Amanita* for the coccora (*A. calypttrata*) or grisette (*A. vaginata*). True, it is sheer stupidity to risk your life for the sake of a single meal, however delectable it may be. But the key word here is risk -- and in the case of a few species such as *A. calypttrata*, *A. caesarea*, and *A. vaginata*, I don't consider it a risk for discriminating amateurs to eat them, provided they become thoroughly familiar with their characteristics and those of their lethal counterparts. Simplistic slogans or catchwords such as 'Do not eat - a the *Amanita*' often accomplish the precise opposite of what they intend. Rather than encouraging people to use their eyes and nose and the gray mass between their ears, to approach each and every mushroom with discrimination, intelligence, and respect, such adages reinforce people's desires for expediency by fostering an unhealthy, mindless reliance on shortcuts and glib generalizations. Those people who need simple rules should learn how to play dominoes or Scrabble rather than eat mushrooms. Adages such as the above can even be misconstrued to read 'If a mushroom isn't an *Amanita* it won't kill you' -- dangerous assumption!

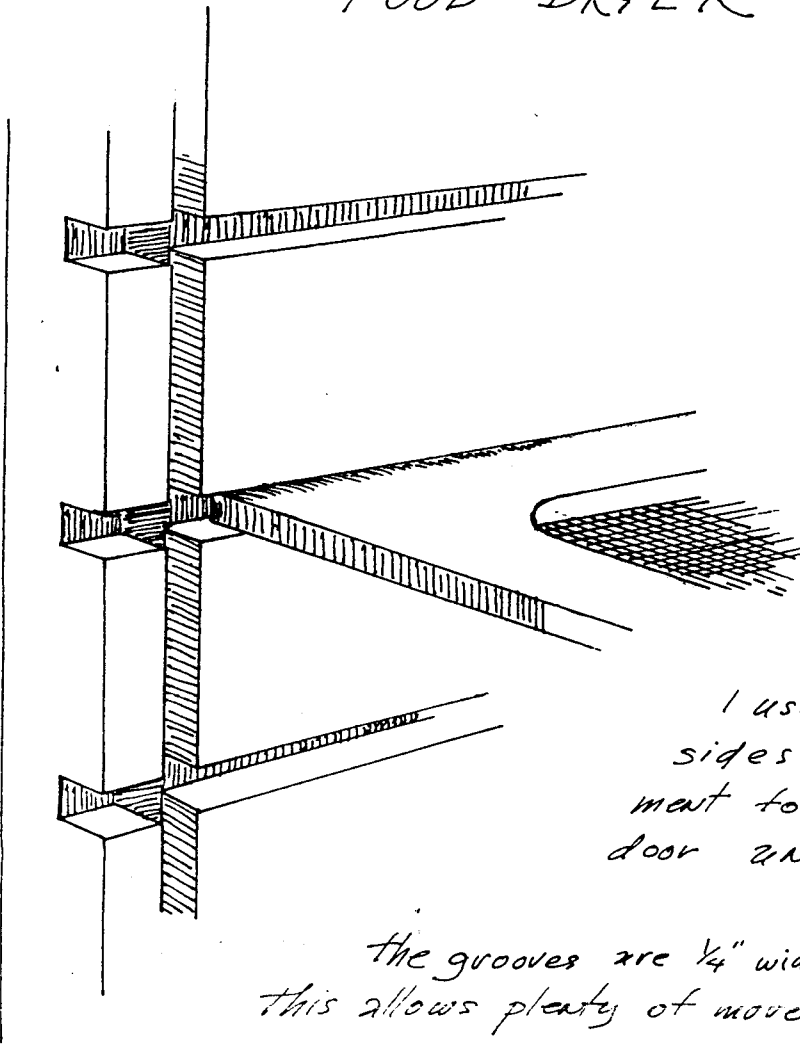
Too many people eat and enjoy edible *Amanitas* for me not to recommend them. But at the risk of being redundant, let me reiterate some rules of the trade. Unless you are ABSOLUTELY, INDISPUTABLY, and IRREFUTABLY sure of your *Amanita*'s identity, don't eat it! (The one adage with which I wholeheartedly concur is: 'When in doubt, throw it out!') ..."

(It's this kind of candor and humor that makes *Mushrooms Demystified* one of, if not the best, mushroom guides ever published in America.)

Mycophagal Experimentation

Last week I experienced another first for me. I ate a mushroom of "unknown edibility". I found a bunch of *Hygrophorus subsalmonius*, "a relatively common late fall mushroom often not seen because it is under the cover of recently fallen leaves." I would not have found them myself but squirrels had left a few mushrooms on top of the leaf litter with only their waxy gills munched off. There were hundreds of the sticky, orange-capped mushrooms. I identified it positively from a monograph on *Hygrophorus* and

FOOD DRYER



This dryer uses a 25 or 40 watt light bulb (your choice) placed in the bottom. The holes in the top and bottom provide air circulation and are very important, carrying moisture out of the dryer.

I used $\frac{3}{4}$ " plywood for the sides and $\frac{1}{4}$ "luan underlay-ment for the back, top, sliding door and trays.

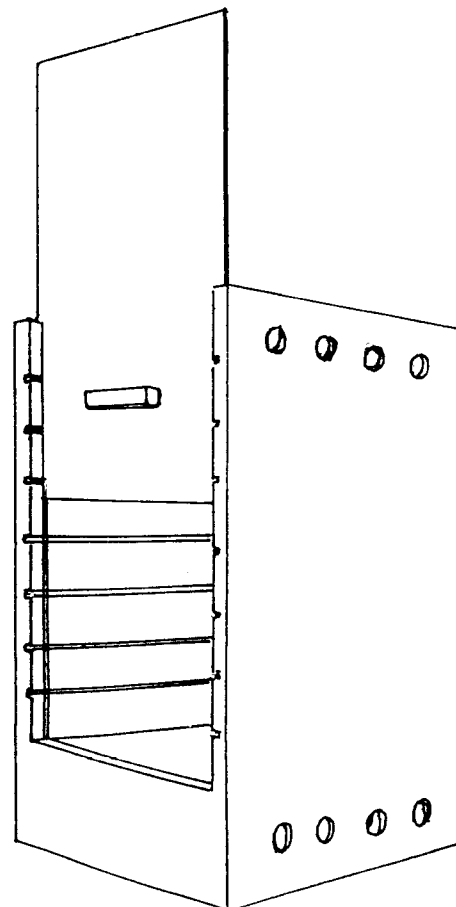
The grooves are $\frac{1}{4}$ " wide and $\frac{3}{8}$ " deep. This allows plenty of movement around the trays.

The trays are cut into pieces which are loosely fitted in the $\frac{1}{4}$ " grooves (luan) plywood is actually thinner than $\frac{1}{4}$ " and are just right for this purpose.

The centers of the trays were cut out leaving a $\frac{1}{4}$ " margin around the outside edges. I stapled fibre glass screening to the frames.

I was concerned that copper or aluminum screen might react with the mushrooms and wanted to be on the safe side.

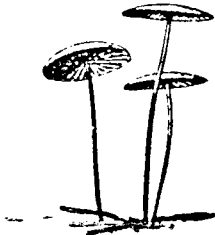
Outside dimensions can vary. Mine is 13" x 13" x 24" tall.



J. Dill '90

Mushrooms and other Fungi of the Midcontinental United States by Huffman, Tiffany and Knaphus. It wasn't in Lincoff or Peterson or any other of my usual sources and mentioned only by name by Arora who did write that none of the Hygrophorus were dangerously poisonous. In the spirit of McIlvaine, who rode horseback over the mountains of West Virginia tasting fungi hitherto unknown, I fried up a few to test them out and had no ill effects. Tonight I will eat some more, perhaps making the "toadstool croquettes" that Capt. McIlvaine cooked over his evening campfires.

Why would I want to do this? The act of pushing limits is uplifting to the spirit; a trip down the road less traveled; a confirmation life itself.

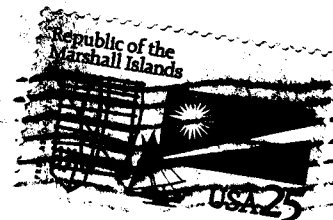


From: Missouri Mycological Society
c/o Philip D. Roos
1956 - B Saratoga
Jefferson City MO 65109

I am unsure of what future mushroom milestones I may pass in the future but be assured, faithful *Earthstar* readers, that they will be reported and further bragged about.

Fall Festival Phil Roos

Ken worked so hard writing this newsletter that he is unable to report on the Fall Festival, which I was unable to attend. Dr. Parmley cooked some wild mushrooms, we have more new members, and a good time was had by all. Perhaps a further report will appear in the next issue.



DUES ARE DUE! DUES ARE DUE!
DON / WANDA DILL
1101 SURREY HILLS DR
ST. LOUIS MO 63117