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CONCERNING MUSHROOMS

By H. M. GLOSTER

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The Common or Field Mushroom.

By most people, the umbrella-shaped fungi commonly seen in our paddocks during the autumn and early spring, are somewhat arbitrarily classed as either "mushrooms" or "toadstools," and it is generally believed that the mushrooms are edible and the toadstools are poisonous.

This is not strictly correct for the scientists tell us that all these umbrella-shaped fungi are species of toadstools. The name mushroom has come to be applied to a small number of the best-known edible forms but many other species are edible and only a small proportion are known to be poisonous.

Mushrooms have been relished as a food for many centuries. History records that the Emperor Claudius was poisoned by fungi prepared by his fourth wife, Agrippina and that the Czar Alexis also lost his life through eating what were apparently thought to be edible mushrooms.

Where there is any doubt as to whether a fungus is edible it is well to leave it severely alone. The varieties generally eaten in Australia are the field mushroom and the horse mushroom. The field mushroom grows in grassy places and usually in sandy soil. It has a white cap with brownish scales and has a ring surrounding the stem below the cap. The "gills" on the underside of the cap are bright pink in colour when the fungi is fresh and become purplish-brown as it ages. The skin peels off readily. In its young stage the common mushroom has an almost globular cap and is commonly known as the button mushroom. These button mushrooms are in great demand as they are delicately flavoured and tender.

The horse mushroom was probably originally named the coarse mushroom. It is much larger than the field mushroom and specimens are often found measuring 12 inches and more across the cap. When young, the gills are not bright pink but pale and faintly salmon-tinted. They pass through a stage of dull pink to purplish-brown as the fungus becomes older. This mushroom

EDIBLE VARIETIES

Most people will be content to leave any doubtful varieties to the expert mycophagists, as the fungus-eaters are termed, and possibly this is a wise move.
also has a ring on the stem and this is stiffer and stands out more definitely than that of the common mushroom described above.

Horse mushrooms are very tough and even long cooking may fail to soften them. For this reason they are somewhat indigestible and many cases of illness after eating large quantities have not been due to any poisonous substance in the fungi but to painful attacks of indigestion.

PRECAUTIONS

Avoid any fungi which have very pale gills and any in which the base of the stem grows in a kind of cup below or near ground level. The base of the stem of the edible mushroom may be bulbous but the presence of a definite cup at the base of the stem is characteristic of some of the most poisonous species.

Avoid over-ripe mushrooms with black gills or those which have been attacked by insects.

Avoid mushrooms which soften easily and those picked in dirty situations.

Avoid any fungi with a disagreeable odour or flavour and reject any which change colour to a marked degree on cutting or bruising and any which do not peel easily.

FUNGUS POISONING

The inedible fungi contain poisons which, if consumed, cause considerable irritation of the throat and stomach, together with vomiting, pain and diarrhoea.

Should such symptoms occur, send for a doctor immediately and give an emetic such as two tablespoons of salt in half a pint of lukewarm water. This emetic should be repeated every five minutes until vomiting occurs freely, after which the patient should be given a dose of castor-oil—two tablespoonfuls for an adult or two teaspoonfuls for a child. To relieve the pain, give olive or salad oil, medicinal paraffin, barley water or gruel.

MUSHROOMS FOR FOOD

The edible mushroom consists largely of water but it contains small quantities of protein, traces of mineral matter and appreciable quantities of the B vitamins.

The chief value of the mushroom is for adding a pleasing and distinctive variation to the flavour of other foods. Mushrooms, if carefully cooked, are easy to digest but should be eaten fresh and in small quantities.
PREPARATION
When gathering mushrooms, always place them in the basket or other receptacle with the gills downward in the normal growing position so that grit will more readily fall away from the fungus. To prepare for cooking, peel the mushrooms and cut off the ends of the stalks then wash in cold salted water keeping the gills downward all the time. Shake and drain, washing a second time if necessary, then dry thoroughly on a cloth.

Mushrooms may be cooked and served in a variety of ways but the more simple forms of preparation are usually the best.

It is a mistake to add strong flavourings, and over-cooking tends to harden the mushrooms and spoil their flavour. They may be used as a main ingredient of a dish or as a flavouring for soups, stews and sauces. Mushroom ketchup has a piquant flavour and is often used to add zest to other dishes. A few simple mushroom recipes are given below.

Mushrooms for Breakfast or Lunch
Prepare the mushrooms as described. Melt a little butter or margarine in the stew pan. Add salt, pepper and a squeeze of lemon juice. Fry mushrooms slowly until tender. (10 to 15 minutes.) Serve hot on buttered toast. Some people substitute a little grated lemon rind and a blade of mace for the lemon juice.

Another popular method is to cook the mushrooms in milk until tender, then thicken with a dessertspoonful of blended flour, flavour as above and serve hot on buttered toast. A tablespoonful of chopped parsley may be used as a flavouring and a diced kidney cooked with the mushrooms gives a distinctive flavour.

Grilled Mushrooms
Select suitable mushrooms of equal size and prepare them as described. Slightly score the outside of the mushrooms and lay them in a piedish then sprinkle with pepper and salt and pour some melted butter or salad oil over them. Allow to remain in the dish for half an hour basting them occasionally with oil or butter.

Grease and heat the grid-iron and grill over glowing coals or a moderate gas-jet for about 10 minutes. The mushrooms should be turned over during cooking.

Serve on hot buttered toast and sprinkle a little lemon juice over each mushroom, or serve without toast placing a green butter-ball on top of each mushroom.

To make the green butter-balls take one ounce of butter, one teaspoonful of chopped parsley, one teaspoonful of lemon juice and salt and pepper to taste.

Chop the parsley very finely so that it will mix thoroughly and add a green tinge to the butter. Mix all the ingredients thoroughly, and form into balls which should not be placed on the food until just before serving.

Mushrooms with Scrambled Eggs
Take sufficient mushrooms to make one cupful when cooked, two or three eggs and seasoning to taste. After cooking the mushrooms in butter or milk until tender, chop them finely and add beaten egg and seasoning then cook slowly until thickened, stirring frequently.

Serve at once on buttered toast.

Mushroom Omelet
Take sufficient mushrooms to make a quarter to half a cupful when cooked, three eggs, salt and pepper to taste, one tablespoonful of water and one teaspoonful of butter or lard for frying.
Cook the mushrooms, chop finely and season to taste.

Separate the yolks from the whites of the eggs and mix the yolks with the water, salt and pepper.

Beat the egg whites stiffly and fold into yolk mixture.

Melt the fat, pour in the mixture and cook gently until a light golden brown.

Place the cooked mushrooms on one half of the omelet and carefully fold the other half over them. Toast the centre of the omelet over glowing coals and serve hot at once, garnishing with cooked whole mushrooms and parsley.

**To Bake Mushrooms**

Take the required quantity of mushrooms, butter, pepper, salt and green butter-balls.

Prepare the mushrooms and remove the stems, then place them in a greased fireproof dish with the gills uppermost and sprinkle with pepper, salt and a few drops of lemon juice.

Lay small pieces of butter on top of the mushrooms and bake for about 15 minutes in a moderate oven.

Serve very hot in the dish in which the mushrooms are cooked and place green butter-balls on top.

**Stewed Mushrooms**

Take half a pound of mushrooms; half an ounce butter, half a cup stock; one tablespoon flour; one tablespoon cream (this may be omitted), two slices toast, salt, pepper and a squeeze of lemon juice.

Prepare the mushrooms leaving the small ones whole but cutting up any large ones.

Place in the stew-pan with butter and a sprinkle of water, salt, and a good squeeze of lemon juice, then stew very slowly with the lid on the pan for ten minutes.

Blend flour with stock and add to the mushrooms, then bring to the boil, stirring all the time. Allow to simmer for a further ten minutes, then add the cream and serve very hot on half slices of toast. A white onion may be cooked separately and cut up and added to the stew. Kidney cooked in the stock gives a good flavour to this dish.

**Mushroom Sauce**

Take one pound of mushrooms, one ounce of butter, one tablespoonful flour, one pint of milk, juice of half a lemon, salt, pepper, nutmeg or mace.

Prepare the mushrooms and cut in halves or quarters if necessary.

Melt the butter in a stew-pan and add mushrooms and lemon juice. Then cover the pan and cook slowly for 15 minutes.

Blend the flour with the milk, add to the mushrooms and stir until boiling point is reached, then simmer for 15 minutes and add seasoning to taste.

This sauce may be served with boiled meat or fish. If served with fish use fish stock instead of milk.

Cooked mushrooms may be added to any white or brown unsweetened sauce.

**Mushroom au Gratin**

Take half a pound of mushrooms, one ounce butter, one teaspoonful chopped parsley, half teaspoonful powdered herbs, two tablespoonfuls bread crumbs, two shallots and salt and pepper.

Prepare the mushrooms and cut off the stalks. Chop shallots finely, mix with herbs, parsley and half the bread crumbs.

Grease a flat pyrex dish with a little butter and sprinkle in half the chopped ingredients, then place the mushrooms on the top with the stalk sides uppermost and season with salt and pepper.

Sprinkle on the remainder of the chopped ingredients, cover with bread crumbs and place small pieces of butter on top.

Bake for 20 minutes in a moderate oven and serve in the pyrex dish, garnishing with parsley.
Mushrooms as Flavouring

A few button mushrooms added to vegetable broth or mutton stew will make a very palatable variation to these dishes. The mushrooms should be prepared and added 15 minutes before serving.

Mushroom Ketchup

Gather early morning mushrooms, prepare as described and break into a basin.

Sprinkle with one ounce of salt to every two pounds of mushrooms and allow to stand for three days.

Simmer until all the juice is out of the mushrooms, then strain off the liquid.

Boil the liquid with the whites and shells of one or two eggs, then strain (this clears the liquid).

Return the liquid to the saucepan and to each quart of liquid add the juice of six shallots, half a teaspoonful peppercorns, half a teaspoonful ground ginger, six or eight allspice, one bay leaf and one tablespoonful of horseradish if liked.

Simmer for three-quarters of an hour, skim, strain, bottle and cork well. Dip the top of each cork into melted wax to make the bottle airtight.

Clearing with egg may be omitted if desired.

Pickled Button Mushrooms

Prepare a suitable quantity of mushrooms, dry thoroughly and rub with salt, then cook slowly at the side of the fire in the liquid which the salt draws from the mushrooms. Continue the cooking until the liquid has evaporated and season to taste with mace and pepper. Cover with vinegar and bring to the boil, then hold at boiling point for a few minutes. Allow the pickle to cool slightly before pouring into bottles and cover the bottles when quite cold.

Mushroom Pie

Take half a pound of mushrooms, half a pint of milk, or milk and water mixed, one tablespoonful plain flour, four ounces bacon, seasoning to taste and six ounces of flaky pastry.

Cook the mushrooms in milk or milk and water until tender, then add one tablespoonful blended flour and stir over the fire until the mixture boils and thickens. Add seasoning to taste.

Arrange the mixture in a piedish in layers, with layers of bacon between, then cover with the pastry and bake in a hot oven until well risen and brown. Cook slowly until the pastry is cooked through.

Mushroom Patties

Prepare half a pound of mushrooms and cut into dice, then stew until tender. Add two tablespoonsful of plain white sauce.

Line some patty tins with flaky pastry, then fill with the mixture. Place a cover of pastry on top of each and bake in a hot oven until brown, then more slowly until the pastry is baked through. (About half an hour.)

On page 104 of the January-February issue, the notes on the food value of rock melons contained references to Vitamin E. These should have read Vitamin C.
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