

## Mushrooms, Deadly, Delicious

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Special Writer for The Birmingham Eccentric

Primitive man, largely dependent upon the wild for food, shelter, clothing and medicine, gradually learned to find his way about on the utilitarian highways of the plant world. But coming upon some ghostly or some colorful mushroom, he no doubt was tempted to sample it out of curiosity and sometimes he died as a result.

His error is repeated at every season and climate where there is enough moisture present to cause these odd plants to send up their fruiting bodies. These are the mushrooms we eat.

The plant itself is hidden underground and consists of a network of tubes called "mycelium." From these the "flower," or fruiting body springs, whose function it is to bear the microscopic spores which take the place of seeds.

THE FRUITING of these primitive plants is so dependent upon moisture that this year's drought has all but erased them from fields and woods. However, of late, since the recent autumn rains, we have found enough fruiting specimens to appear in the pages of the collector and the family.

Fungi reach their fruiting climax in September and October. Each year we see one collected who have no scientific information gathering mechanism by the back of their head. Most of the people live because they have gained a kind of "recognition" of the several species which they are.

However, this method allows for a margin of error which may result in the above mentioned result.

OTHERS EVEN take cautions, take the advice of the uniformed. Many rely on superstitions such as "If a mushroom smells, it is good to eat." If it blackens anywhere, it is poisonous.

Let us brush aside all this nonsense and get down to structural characteristics, the recognition of which is the only safe guide for the collector.

On the positive side—all puff balls (provided they are firm and white) and all morels (sponge mushrooms) are safe for even the amateur collector. One caution here—the family Helvella includes the "brain" mushrooms which resemble the morels and is a disputed group. The distinguishing mark is a "convoluted" instead of a "pitted" cap surface. Avoid the "brain" mushroom.

ON THE dangerous side are

advanced, "A Mushroom Handbook," by Louis C. Krieger. Dr. Smith's book which is accompanied by colored stereo-photographs, is for the student.

Mushrooms are only a small minority in the great group of fungus plants which to a major extent dominates the world. While a few are destructive to living species of both plants and animals, the majority are scavengers—feeding on death so that life may begin all over again.

three guide posts. When all three occur in one specimen, mark it with a cross bone and skull— for it may spell death.

Number one. Learn to observe carefully the color of gills underneath the cap. If they are white—be alert.

Number two. Always look for the "ring" on the stem. This is a membranous remnant of a veil which in the early stages of some species protects the gills. As the cap expands the "veil" ruptures leaving a ring attached part way down on the stem. Is there a ring or even the mark of a ring present?

Number three. Does the stem end in a bulb or cup? A bulb is not a danger sign but a cup is and often the latter is buried underground. Therefore be sure to "dig" for your mushroom.

IF YOU CANNOT distinguish between a bulbous base which is a thickened stem and a cup which is an applied membrane, discard specimens which have either.

After you learn to recognize the above structural characteristics you are ready to apply the one safe rule. Never collect a mushroom which has all three, viz. white gills, a cup on the stem and a bulb at the base.

If you follow this rule you will eliminate the four deadly species of the Amanita family which are capable of revealing death. They harbor several violent poisons for which there is no certain antidote.

The Amanita family is particularly dangerous because of its superficial resemblance to the edible Agaricus family of which the popular meadow mushroom is a member. However this latter genus has pale pink gills which turn brown. These are the distinguishing marks for a ring and in some species a bulbous stem is present.

MICHIGAN mycologist, Dr. A. H. Smith, lists eight additional species of poisonous mushrooms in our area. However, these are not so likely to be collected partly because of their rarity, their small size or unfamiliar appearance. There is not space here to describe each of these.

We suggest that you cannot collect mushrooms with complete safety until you are thoroughly familiar with each from the structural point of view.

For the beginner we suggest Margaret McKenny's, "Mushrooms of Field and Wood." For the more

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## Pembroke Greet Parents Oct. 25

Pembroke school is having open house for parents on Oct. 25 at 8 p.m.

Parent-Teacher association president Robert C. Kirkby will conduct a short business meeting before parents adjourn to children's classrooms.

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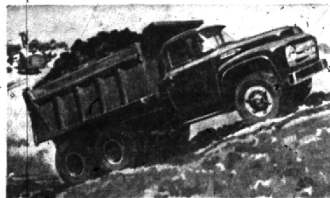
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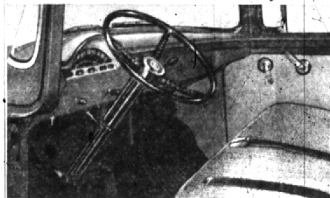
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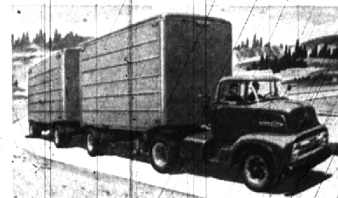
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