

# Seeds2Plate



## Adventures with Mushrooms!

Follow-up questions and answers from the webinar: (thank you Ryan & Emily!)

### **Q: Will mushroom caps expand after picking, if gathered when closed?**

A: Once detached from the mycelium, most mushrooms stop growing or even expanding. But the ones that start out growing inside a cocoon-like universal veil (such as the infamous genus Amanita, and all the bizarre Stinkhorns too)—those will continue to grow and open up after being detached. So you can collect Amanita “eggs”, put them in a vase, and watch them hatch! (just be sure no pets can grab and eat them). You can do the same with Stinkhorns, hatch the “eggs” in a vase...but they really don’t smell so great...

**Editor’s note:** I recently did this with a Stinkhorn Ravenii and it worked! The egg opened and a stem emerged. It didn’t fully develop as it was partially frozen when I brought it in. It definitely had a smell but it wasn’t too bad!

### **Q: Will the amount of rain, or drought, affect the growth pattern of these mushrooms?**

A: Yes, rain is always helpful, and a drought is never helpful. It helps the mycelium grow and produce mushrooms. This year, even though it rained in October and we had a decent season in some ways, that rain was not really enough to turn things around. The drought had made the spring and summer mushroom seasons really disappointing this year, and it had a lingering negative effect on the fall too. 2022 was the worst season we've seen so far (2016 was also pretty lousy). Normally, there is great mushroom hunting from May through late November.

### **Q: How do you prepare one of these large mushrooms?**

A: Each of the large species has its own kind of structure, so you have to sort of just work with it and figure it out. For example, you'll find that a Hen of the Woods is a bit like a cauliflower--there's a central trunk, with branches coming out, and each small branch ends with a flat "cap", "feather", "leaf", whatever you want to call them. These little caps on a Hen of the Woods are just the right

thickness--they can simply be sliced off and sauteed, as-is. All the pieces you sauté should be from 1/8" thick to 1/4" thick, so sometimes a big thick one ought to be sliced the flat way, like a bagel, to make it thinner--so you can cook it thoroughly in the same amount of time as the other pieces. Now you're left with the "trunk" of it. Unlike most other edible mushrooms from the polypore family, the Hen does not get stiff and leathery with age...so you can actually slice the trunk into slabs and cook those too! You'll find the base area of the mushroom is embedded with dirt; you'll want to slice that away and discard it. Cleaning a large Hen is quite a challenge! But it's fun.

**Q: You mentioned using a mushroom knife - can you use a kitchen type knife?**

A: You can use a kitchen knife if you want, but that's better used in the kitchen. I definitely would find a way to shield the knife in a protective case. When you're hiking, if you happen to slip and fall, you don't want a loose knife in your pocket. It's better to use a folding pocketknife. Many types of brushes can be used, too--you don't necessarily need to have a mushroom knife (which is basically a convenient knife and brush multitool).

**Q: What should I use to hold the harvested mushrooms, once I find them, to transport them?**

A: We collect mushrooms in wax paper sandwich bags. Paper bags are OK too, but not Ziplocs or Tupperware. Don't enclose them in plastic, unless it's a cooler or refrigerator! We like to keep different species in separate bags. They don't contaminate each other, we just like to be organized about it. The traditional way to gather them is with a basket, but we've found that this makes our secret mushroom paths obvious to anyone who sees us! So we put our wax bags of mushrooms into our backpacks. We transfer them to a cooler when we get to the car and transfer the bags to the refrigerator as soon as we can. They'll keep for a week or so if they're pretty fresh when you find them.

**Q: Symptoms of mushrooms poisoning?**

A: This one is complicated...

There are two main categories of poisonous mushrooms: MILDLY POISONOUS and DEADLY POISONOUS.

Mildly poisonous mushrooms do not cause death, they basically cause gastric upset. Sometimes it's simply vomiting and then feeling better, but some of these so-called "mildly" poisonous species are quite awful, putting a person in the hospital for a few days with excruciating cramps, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, dehydration. Certain ones of the "mildly poisonous" category are known to be especially nasty experiences. I've heard that the Jack-o'-lantern and the Green Spored Parasol (*Chlorophyllum*) are two of the worst. These poisonings can also cause other odd symptoms on occasion, but mainly it's stomach upset, to whatever degree. It generally begins within an hour or two of eating the mushrooms.

There are species that are deadly poisonous because they destroy the liver and kidneys. Only about a dozen species from the USA and Canada are known to be deadly, but eating just one can sometimes kill a person. Another scary element is that with the deadly ones, the symptoms don't appear until 6 to 24 hours after ingestion. Hospital care ASAP is crucial. So this is one reason why we have that system of which ones are safe for beginners--that way you're not messing with anything that might resemble the deadly ones. That takes time and experience.

One of the "scariest" mushrooms we eat is *Lepiota procera*--it has several deadly look-alikes among the Amanitas and Deadly Lepiotas. But we took our time learning all of the above, first collecting the edible ones without eating them, and studying the poisonous look-alikes whenever we saw them. Luckily, with something like Black Trumpets, it's a far simpler species to learn to identify on your own.

Some would say there is a third category of poisonous mushrooms if they consider hallucinogenic mushrooms "toxic". This is highly debatable, but you can check out recent research by Johns Hopkins showing the beneficial and healing effects of psilocybin and the psychedelic experience in specific situations. That chemical is mainly associated with certain species from genus *Psilocybe*, although locally the one we find most often is *Gymnopilus spectabilis* / *Gymnopilus junonius* ("Laughing Gyms"). The "symptoms" include imagined colors and patterns, spiritual introspection, and general hilarity.

There are some other weird categories too. For example, there is one species, the Alcohol Inky Cap, that is safe to eat and delicious (we've had it several times), but if you drink a beer later that day, or even a couple days later, you'd get violently ill! That one is in a category all its own. Another famous mushroom, *Amanita muscaria*, is often erroneously referred to as a "magic mushroom" as it does cause intoxication, but it contains a deliriant chemical, not a psychedelic one, and sometimes contains other toxins as well.

In summary, there's a lot to learn. It's best to learn about species one at a time as you find them. You learn about what it is and what else it might be mistaken for. Your knowledge of different species and the different categories they belong to will gradually increase. Take advantage of our help. We can teach you as you go.

**Answers from The Mushroom Hunting Foundation**  
<https://mushroomhunting.org/>

