



Mushrooms are Toadstools

➤ THERE IS NO sure way of distinguishing between mushrooms and toadstools, simply because there is no distinction between them. Mushrooms are toadstools and toadstools are mushrooms. Both names are words descriptive of a plant of a certain shape. Any fleshy fungus with a cap and a stalk is a mushroom. It is also a toadstool. The common field agaric, which is the only species cultivated and sold, is an edible toadstool. The fly-agaric, so called because a sweetened decoction of it was formerly used as a home-made fly-poison, is a deadly mushroom. To parody Gertrude Stein just once more: a mushroom is a toadstool is a mushroom.

If you're going out a-gathering mushrooms, you will of course want to know which ones are good to eat and which are poisonous. Regrettably, there is no easy rule-of-thumb test for toxicity in mushrooms (or toadstools).

The old one about mushrooms with white gills being safe and those with

black gills being poisonous is just about as far from the facts as it can get. The ordinary mushrooms of the market have black gills when they become mature, and so do the even tastier wild inky-cap mushrooms—as indeed their name indicates. On the other hand, the genus *Amanita*, which has only one edible species, all the others being extremely poisonous, is innocently white underneath all the days of its brief life.

Other tests, like turning a silver spoon black, and easy peeling of the skin off the cap, are equally unreliable. One test, which classifies as poisonous all mushrooms with loose scales on the cap, is good as far as it goes, for loose scales, remnants of the veil that hangs at mid-stalk, are one of the marks of the *Amanita*. But there are other poisonous genera that do not have these scales; moreover, a heavy rain sometimes washes the scales off an *Amanita* cap, leaving it smooth and glistening.

No; the only way to tell poisonous from edible mushrooms is to learn how to identify them, species by species. That is less work than you might think; thanks to the widespread interest in the subject there are several good books for the amateur mushroom hunter, and a considerable number of useful pamphlets, published by state agricultural experiment stations, museums, and so on. Armed with one of these, and using reasonable caution you can get many a tasty food treat free—which is something of a feat, these days.

Science News Letter, June 21, 1947

AERONAUTICS

"Mudder" Planes Tested With Track-Type Gear

➤ SOME PLANES in the future, like some horses, are going to be good "mudders."

A tractor-track of the endless belt type will be installed soon on the landing gear of an Army cargo plane to test its ability to permit aircraft to land on soft dirt, mud or sand. It is a track similar to that used on caterpillar tractors.

The installation of this track-type landing gear will be on a Fairchild C-82 Packet, a twin-engine, 54,000-pound transport originally designed for use on short, unimproved fields. It has a large rear door through which heavy equipment can be loaded into its box-car like body.

The idea is not entirely new. Track-type landing gear has already been tested on Douglas A-20's. It is now being adapt-

ed to the heavy plane. The installation will provide a wide tracked surface on the nose and each main gear, all three to be retractable in the same manner as conventional wheel landing gear.

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PSYCHIATRY

One Out of 140 Americans Is Perfect But Boring

➤ ONE out of every 140 Americans is perfect, Dr. Earl D. Bond, University of Pennsylvania professor of psychiatry, estimates.

The one million perfect persons in our midst have no anxiety, no fears, no prejudices, no attractive vices, no weaknesses. They will probably live long.

But you probably won't envy them, even if you are one of the two and one-half million neurotics or one of the 133 million Americans unnecessarily handicapped by too much conscience or struggling with feelings of inferiority. For here is how Dr. Bond described them to life insurance medical officials meeting in Ashville, N. C.

Like the few completely insane people, they are not interesting. They don't seem human. They are all perfect and well rounded, "like a string of zeros."

Science News Letter, June 21, 1947

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