

Inexpensive Summer Fun

Mushrooms May Be Good But If They Are Bad—

(Sixth of a series of 12 articles. Next week—Collecting Rocks)



Toadstools and mushrooms—fungi, in a word,—are easy to collect and, in most cases, dry out well. As far as edibility goes—know your mushroom before you eat it. The Amanitas, typical of which is the second mushroom from the right, are poisonous; you can tell it by the cup at the bottom of the stalk, the ring around the stalk just under the cap, and the scales on top of the cap itself.

MUSHROOMS and toadstools are always objects of interest, if only for the question of edibility they always present. They are *so* tempting—and the bad ones are *so* dangerous! Like the little girl in the old rhyme, “when they are good they are very, very good, but when they are bad they are horrid.”

But mushrooms, and other fungus growths in general, are excellent things to collect as a hobby. They are easy to get, and some of them at least are easy to keep—though it must be admitted that most fungi do shrivel somewhat when dried. But even at that, they make interesting specimens; and you’d never guess until you started collecting them how many and what varied kinds there are.

Collecting fungi is quite as simple as collecting mosses. Just pick them, lay them out in the open on sheets of newspaper until they are dried, and put them away in your boxes. Be sure to label them as carefully as you label

your herbarium folders of wildflowers or leaves.

You will find, with a little experience, that some kinds of fungi can’t be collected successfully at all. The inky-caps and shaggy-manes, for example, dissolve into blobs of black fluid in a few hours and the curious growths known as Jew’s-ears are too gelatinous to dry out well. On the other hand, there is nothing to spoil about a dry puffball, and certainly not about the hard, woody shelf-fungi that won’t come loose from the trees they grow on unless you hit them with a Scout ax.

In between are the fairly firm types like the common field agaric (that is the one sold in stores), the odd-looking but very tasty morel (also called, appetizingly, the beefsteak mushroom), the honey mushroom and the oyster mushroom that grow out of trees, and the strange, many-toothed objects called coral fungi, that grow in the woods. All these and many more species besides, dry out

into satisfactory collection specimens.

Another interesting thing the fungus collector can do is make spore prints. Mushrooms and other fungi don’t have seeds, but infinitely smaller things, called spores, that serve to distribute and propagate their species. These fall out from the gills or pores on the underside of the cap and are borne away in the air.

If you cut the stalk of a mushroom off short and lay the underside of the cap down flat on a sheet of white paper overnight, in the morning there will be an exact pattern of the gill or pore structure under it. Stick a pin or a fishhook or some other improvised handle into the cap before you set it down at night, so you can lift it in the morning without disturbing the spores. Spore prints can be made permanent by gently spraying them with the kind of fixative solution artists use to keep charcoal sketches from smudging.

For more information about collecting mushrooms and toadstools and a list of books and pamphlets on the subject, send us a postcard with your name and address. Ask for Bulletin 6. Address: Science News Letter, 2101 Constitution Ave., Washington, D. C.

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GEOLOGY

Using Snow Blanket To Preserve Mammoth

WARM weather of July on Wrangel Island, far inside the Arctic circle, is making difficult the preservation of the carcass of the extinct mammoth discovered there, Tass reports. A wire net and a layer of snow are being used as a make-shift, giant refrigerator to preserve the carcass and prevent its destruction by wild animals, until the expedition from the Academy of Sciences of the U. S. S. R. arrives to take charge of the rare find. The mammoths were a giant species of hairy elephant, long-extinct, which once roamed far into Arctic climes before the last Ice Age.

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