

# Spore-Addict Times

The Newsletter of the Pikes Peak Mycological Society

April 1991

## A preseason sampling

by Lee Barzee

Have you just switched from cabin fever to spring fever? Are you ready to spruce up? Have you posted charts regarding exercise/cholesterol counts or lists-on-the-fridge?

*Mushrooming* is the answer! Pikes Peak mushroomers participate! Well, mushrooms aren't popping out-of-doors in Colorado just yet, but...

*Mushrooms* are the answer. Exercise your bod to the supermarkets, gourmet/import stores and see the wonders. Exercise your mind with this extraordinary opportunity to experience the new shapes and flavors of store mushrooms now available here in Colorado Springs. From produce bins to your home pots, prepare the exotic foods of the gods at your own home stove. Nourish the spirit like a poet (or myco-cuisine chef, Steve Flohr). Hone that fungiphile edge before the wild foray season!

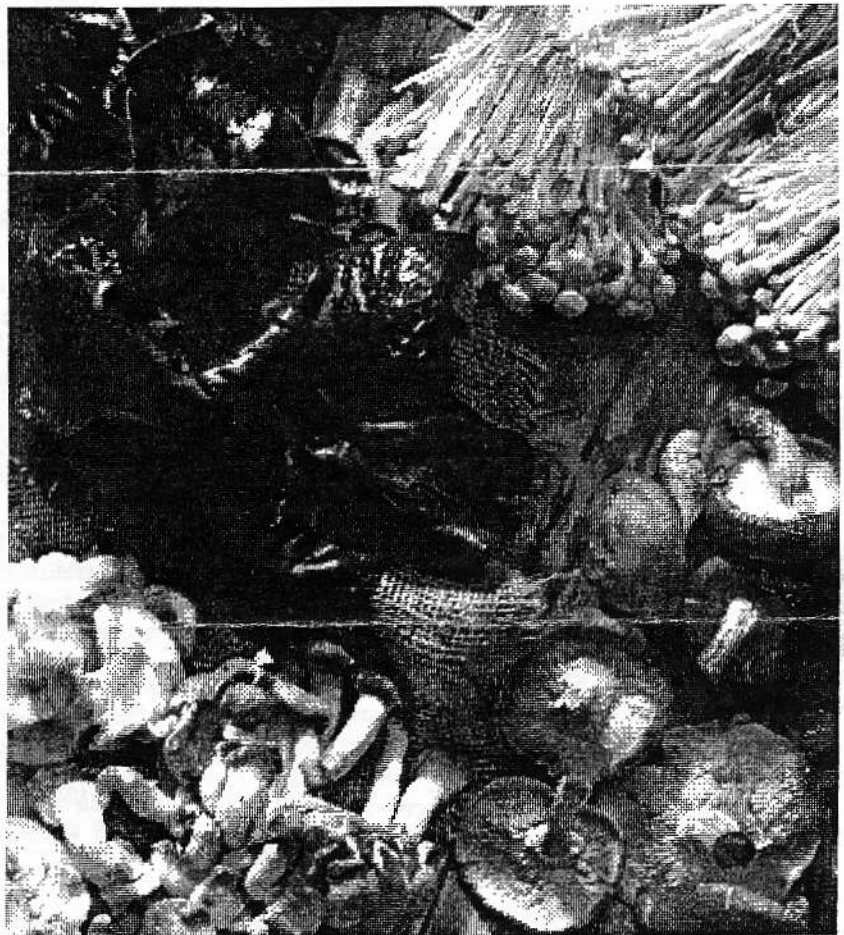
Mushrooms are low in calories, have no cholesterol, are a fair source of fiber, and contain the B-vitamins thiamine, niacin, and riboflavin.

For a fine, not-quite-spring start try the fresh or dried, wild and cultivated species illustrated in the accompanying photograph. Healthful, little-effort recipes are found in numerous cookbooks, including *The American Heart Association Cookbook*, *Count Out Cholesterol Cookbook*, and, with vivid title, *Don't Eat Your Heart Out Cookbook*.

Enoki is really *Flammulina velutipes*. However, the cultivated

variety looks nothing like its wild cousin growing by aspen here in Colorado. Sometimes the latter is called "winter mushroom" or, by Gary Lincoff, "the velvet foot."

The enoki's lack of color and very long stipe (3 to 4 inches) and pinhead caps are the result of the cultivation process. I've read that this is often done in narrow glass tubes—logically a developmental restriction. Note the charms we recognize here, the delight of the small enoki or Bonsai arrangements, were developed in Japan, whose symbolism and his-



Clockwise from top right: enoki, shiitake, oyster, and wood ear. (From *Cooking Light*, Oxmoor House, 1990)

## Sampling, continued

tory are integrated into all aspects of their artistic culture. Here the white to ivory color represents purity.

The flavor and crisp texture of enoki make them a perfect addition as a garnish to salads or "crunch" in stir-fry dishes. They are a tasteful treat even if never a main dish.

Shiitake is *Lentinus edodes*. The most commonly sold type of dried Oriental mushroom, this is a lignicolous [grows on wood—ED.] species unique to the Japanese islands. It has been cultivated in Japan for at least 2000 years. Sometimes called "the oaktree mushroom," the shiitake is cultivated on—what else—oak logs. Many of you no doubt have seen the Japanese film on this cultivation process. You also may know that "take" simply means "mushroom," and "shii" means "oak." However, the oak referred to is *Quercus pasania*, a species of oak we do not have in this country.

There is no known close North American relative of the shiitake. Consequently, the U.S. has become a major consumer of the Japanese fungus. Shiitake specialty industries have sprung up in the Central Valley, California, and I understand that they sell the mushrooms for as much as \$20 per pound. I prefer to sample mine in Chinese restaurants. Used in China for as many centuries as in Japan, the shiitake was eaten to treat heart disease.

Dried shiitake 'shrooms are available locally (at lower cost than that mentioned above). After rehydrating them, sauté them lightly with seasoning or garlic. The stems are somewhat tough but can be used to flavor soups and stocks. Yum, yum! And they're "heartily" low in cholesterol!

Oyster mushrooms, *Pleurotus ostreatus*, needs but small review since most of you have gathered these fine wild edibles locally and have even grown them from kits or cultures. Field cap colors of the oysters vary from pearly grey to tan to creamy beige, and even white. My very small wild collection, all white, seemed to check out to *P. candidissimus*. Its size would scarcely fill the space between the teeth, yet mycologist O. K. Miller, Jr., states "all are edible." Surely he refers to the complex of closely related larger species.

Oyster fungi are interesting for they do have different spore colors (white to buff to pale lilac), different cap colors, different tastes, and different host tree species, for a start. Culture samples of *P. sajor-caju*, distributed by Walter Johnson, fruited with a sunshine cap for at least one club member, thus pleas-

ingly contributing to the club tangent of photography. (That oyster was reportedly very bland in taste.) The best oyster tasting in my experience was from a cluster found in Colorado growing on a live aspen.

*Pleurotus ostreatus* is more frequently found on dead stumps, particularly of cottonwood. Our list of clues to this mushroom would be incomplete without a note of its common associate, the little beetle with the red pronotum (pronotum = a dorsal sclerite of the prothorax, not head, so there!). Fun to identify, fun to photograph, and great to eat: *Pleurotus* (without beetle, of course).

Wood ear (*Auricularia polytricha* = "black fungus") is

grown commercially in China and other regions of the Orient. It is a native to Japan, Taiwan, Tahiti, and southern Australia, but is most popular in China.

### Texas-style mushrooms

- vegetable cooking spray
- 2 teaspoons picanté sauce
- 1 teaspoon vegetable oil
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1 lb. small fresh mushrooms, sliced
- 1/4 teaspoon onion powder
- fresh cilantro sprigs (optional)

Coat a large skillet with cooking spray; add picanté sauce and oil. Place over medium heat until hot. Add garlic and sauté one minute. Add mushrooms, cilantro, and onion powder; sauté three to five minutes. Garnish with fresh cilantro, if desired. Serve immediately. (From *Cooking Light*, edited by Ann H. Harvey, Oxmoor House, 1990)

### Spore-Addict Times

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Colorado Springs, CO 80901

is published monthly from April through October by the Pikes Peak Mycological Society. Submissions of articles, book reviews, letters, artwork, and ideas are welcome.

The Pikes Peak Mycological Society is a non-profit organization dedicated to advancing interest in, and understanding of, the field of mycology.

#### Officers

Mary Will	President	(719) 599-0118
Mike Chladek	Vice President	(719) 597-6723
Annette Campbell	Secretary	(719) 593-9912
Liz Ras	Treasurer	(719) 473-1248
Lori Ligon	Foray Coordinator	(719) 635-2213
David Watson	Newsletter Editor	(719) 593-9912

#### Membership

Membership is open to all persons interested in mycology. A gastronomic passion for wild fungi is not required. Annual dues are \$10 for individual and family memberships.

## Sampling, continued

This fungus has always had the reputation of a longevity tonic. Coronary artery disease in China in general, and in the southern provinces in particular, is uncommon. The New England Journal of Medicine in May 1980 reported studies in reference to the fungus's anti-bloodclotting aspects. Some researchers think that eating wood ears with garlic and scallions, as is often done in China, may explain the low incidence of arteriosclerotic disease there.

Dried and imported, this wood ear is darkish brown to purplish. When reconstituted by soaking in hot water for at least 30 minutes, it adds a pleasing firm, gelatinous texture to softer foods, but little or no flavor. The "tricha" part of the species name refers to

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### "Exercise your bod to the supermarkets..."

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the undersurface of the specimen which is covered with minute hairs. These hairs are only micro-detectable in the field or lab and are deliciously unapparent when the mushroom is found—slippery, leathery, and translucent—in Chinese restaurant dishes.

Club members may be familiar with our Colorado ear fungus, *Auricularia auricula*. This species is not uncommon on dead wood near streams in the Rocky Mountains. I have not eaten it, though it is edible. I beg samples from your collections, please, for further study. I've read published reports dating back to 1910 about this fascinating heterobasidiomycete (remember them?). A many-state repository at Farlow Herbarium, Boston, includes a Colorado collection (perhaps a 100-year comparative project for a senior retiree amateur???)

Chinese cooks frequently use the wood ear as one of their favorite ingredients. They tell you that drinking a tea made from this fungus will "ease headache, is good for stomach ailments, and leads to a long and happy life." The tea is "flavored with an odorless and tasteless fungus to which garlic and scallions have been added." Hmmmm...

Anyway, this is the fifteenth year of the Pikes Peak Mycological Society. Won't you try a fungal species essential to fine dining in the Far East for a healthful seasonal start? To keep you on an experiencing, mushrooming track, and to assure you this was not meant to be autobiographical, I have included a recipe.

## Meeting news

☞ April. Our first meeting will be on Monday, 22 April, 7:00 P.M., in the Junior League office at 2914 Beacon Street, just south of Fillmore Street.

Our new president has secured an exciting first meeting for us by enlisting the services of none other than our last president—Mr. Mushroom Culture himself—Walt Johnson. Walt will present a slide show on spring mushrooms.

But that's not all. Take a few extra dollars to the meeting because Walt will also raffle off a couple of morel mushroom kits. And as if that weren't enough, Walt is also taking to the meeting some surprises from a mycelium mass that is currently fruiting.

Speaking of morels, let's not forget to pump Dennis Craig for the location of his local wild morel supply.

Stacks of mushroom cultivation catalogs and other mushroom-related advertising recently arrived at the society's post office box. Look for these at the meeting; they're free for the taking.

☞ May. Because Memorial Day falls on Monday, the May meeting will be held on Tuesday, 28 May.

## Forays

Watch this space in upcoming issues for the latest foray plans and results.

As always, we need volunteer foray leaders who are willing to reveal their favorite collecting spots to the rest of the Society. Forays do not have to focus on edibles.

Calling committee assignments probably need revision. Current calling committee members should see Lori Ligon, our foray coordinator, at the April meeting.

## Dues are due

Please send \$10.00 to

Liz Ras  
1014 Arcturus Drive  
Colorado Springs, CO 80906

or pay at the April meeting. You need to pay no later than the May meeting to guarantee uninterrupted membership privileges and continued newsletters.



# Stems and pieces



**First 'shroom of season collected.** On 10 March, Annette Campbell collected what is believed to be the first wild mushroom of the season in Colorado Springs. Annette collected a single *Leucoagaricus* sp. growing under Norfolk Island Pine. "Norfolk Island Pine doesn't grow in Colorado," you say? True, but they are quite common in local shopping mall planters. Annette was on her way to a movie when she spotted the 8-inch-tall specimen. ☔

## Rain Report

Do you wonder how long you'll have to wait for your first crop of wild edibles? Perhaps you're anxious for a fungus photo opportunity. Of course, the lower the rainfall, the longer the wait. The Rain Report brings you expert opinions on the long-range outlook for rainfall and temperature.

The National Weather Service predicts, for 16 April to 15 May, normal temperatures and slightly greater than normal rainfall in Colorado Springs. Normal rainfall for that period is 1.85 inches.

However, *The Old Farmer's Almanac* predicts substantially below-average rainfall for April and May

**Telluride Mushroom Conference.** The eleventh annual Telluride Mushroom conference will be in Telluride, Colorado (no kiddin'), 22-25 August 1991. The Conference is designed for persons interested in collecting, eating, cooking, cultivating, and studying wild mushrooms. Contact Fungophile, P.O. Box 480503, Denver, CO 80248-0503, (303) 296-9359. ☔

**Thailand Mushroom Tour.** The highland of Thailand tour, 11-29 October 1991, will be led by Gary Lincoff and Emanuel Salzman, M.D. Contact Fungophile at the above address and number. ☔

in both the southern Rocky mountains and on the plains. In general, *Farmer's* anticipates a warm, dry spring in the southern Rockies.

Next month we'll see who's right.

## From the editor

Lee Barzee is this month's heroine. Lee courageously consented to write her fact-filled feature for the first newsletter of the year.

The thrill of publication can be yours too. Mail me your manuscripts, or call me with your ideas. To avoid a truly "spore-addict" newsletter, I need help.

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Lee Barzee

38 Friendship Lane  
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