

Where to find mushrooms

The Ecological Approach

by Alexander H. Smith

Tips on how to look for mushrooms:

- Work up a slope until you begin to see mushrooms and then work laterally along the slope. You can see mushrooms better this way than by working down the slope.
- Most mushrooms found on humus, duff or soil live in association with certain species of woody plants. Learn which mushrooms are found with which trees.

Where to find Mushrooms:

Most Colorado citizens are familiar with our different plant zones: desert; sage; juniper; scrub oak; aspen; spruce/fir (including all conifers); brushy stream valleys at all elevations; subalpine habitats. Some of the fungi in all of these areas will produce "mushrooms." The only problem the collector faces is that of being in the right place at the right time.

When to look for mushrooms:

- As the snow melts in Spring, look around the edges of large snow banks.
- Within a week after the Summer rains have started. Usually mid-July to the end of August, depending on the geographic location.
- If the rains come late, look at elevations near to above tree-line.
- During a rainy season, hunt on well lighted Southern exposures.
- During a hot season, look for well vegetated Northern slopes and pay attention to local wet spots. Also look on stream banks.
- In late Summer. after the nights get frosty, look in stream valleys under alder and willow.

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What to do when you find some mushrooms:

- The first step is to get them home in an undamaged condition. The following are musts:
 - 1) Dig up the specimen and carefully remove excess dirt so that the specimen can later be examined for special structures.
 - 2) Note any pieces of tissue or scales on the cap, especially patches of fibrils along the margin.
 - 3) Note any remnants of tissue on the stalk, such as appressed fibrils, scales, zones or rings.
 - 4) Wrap the collection carefully in waxed paper and stand it upright in your collecting basket. Do not use plastic bags or wrap. The plastic causes the mushrooms to deteriorate rapidly.
 - 5) Be careful not to leave the mushrooms in a closed car in Summer. They will spoil quickly.
- Consult with an experienced CMS member on the identification of your mushrooms or bring them to the next CMS meeting.
- Once you have learned enough relative to finding, handling and identifying mushrooms, you can consider collecting them for food.
- Keep each species to be eaten in a separate bag, for obvious reasons!
- When collecting mushrooms for the table, collect them as cleanly as possible. After examining the base, cut off the part covered with adhering dirt and place the mushrooms in a bag. Paper bags are good. Don't use plastic.
- Collecting varies enormously from year to year in the same place. This is why the ecological approach is recommended. One strives to understand the species, and this involves how, where and when to find them!