Living in a relatively mycophobic culture, coupled with the fact that the Horse Whisperer author Nicholas Evans has been in the news recently for almost killing himself after mistakenly eating Deadly Webcaps Cortinarius rubellus, as well as the 12 year old girl who in September ate two Death Caps Amanita phalloides and, unexpectedly but fortunately, survived, some of you may consider the answer. In the fungal realm a similar situation arises. The Death Cap is a poisonous (often fatally so) plant in the Solanaceae or nightshade family, and yet there are many tasty edible Amanitas, some even considered as gourmet fare.

I want to encourage you to eat certain mushrooms in this Amanita genus: fungi that I’ve eaten for years, and that are frequently eaten in Europe and elsewhere but that are very rarely eaten here. These are: Tawny Grisette (Amanita fulva), The Busher (A. rubescens), Grey Spotted Amanita (A. excels var. spissa/A. spissa) and Fly Agaric (A. muscaria). OK, the latter isn’t commonly consumed (as food) in Europe but its edibility is well documented. Let’s eat it more frequently and shock even those know-it-all fungi-loving Europeans!

In fact, having consumed the latter fungus as food for years, it was somewhat dismaying, indeed hypochondriacal of hubris writing in a previous article for this magazine, to trot out the usual stereotypical nonsense about the outright toxic and inedible nature of Fly Agaric. Here I seek to redress the situation with a more balanced approach. This is a very good general rule. Nevertheless, there may be situations where you can only identify a fungus down to genus level and not know the exact species name. However, if you are familiar with all the poisonous or suspect fungi in that genus and know the one you’ve found isn’t one of them, then perhaps you can identify it. That is largely part of my approach to the Russula, Hygrocybe, Boletus, and Agaricus genera. However, do bear in mind that a book like Roger Phillips’ Mushrooms, is highly unappealing largely comprises, only includes 1250 species of the 4000 odd found in Britain. Learning all the members of a group from such a book, then, will not imply you have familiarised yourself with all members of that genus. Multiple reference guides are essential in this regard.

Although I’ve mentioned some key distinguishing features for fungi generally below, using an id guide familiarize yourself with, amongst other things features, caps: colour, size, shape, striations, fibres, scales, peel/descent贴, stink when wet; stem colour, size, width, patterning, ring present or absent, basal sac, hollow or solid, colour change when handled or cut; Gill Tubes: colour, free or attached to stem, crowded, changing colour with maturity; Flesh: colour, texture, smell, colour change when cut or handled; Spores: colour, shape if have a compound microscope) etc. Above all, make no assumptions. For instance, you may find 5 Blushers at different sizes and stages of growth near to each other, don’t assume the small similar looking one nearby is a blusher unless you can discern key identifying features. The small button sized one without spots in the picture looks very much like a death cap (although it did flush when handled, a Death Cap would not have done so (See image).

**Fly Agaric Amanita muscaria**

One of the main reasons for anybody collecting fungi is that one has consumed a fungus after making a mistaken identification and thereby is about to suffer the consequences of serious poisoning, even death. Fly Agaric cuts out that problem immediately.

Fly Agaric Risotto (serves 4-6)

**INGREDIENTS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1/2 lb</td>
<td>Fly Agaric mushrooms²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500g</td>
<td>Cep/Porcini (Boletus edulis)²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100g</td>
<td>Odoursome oyster mushroom²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60g</td>
<td>Field mushrooms²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 sprigs</td>
<td>fresh thyme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>spring onion, finely chopped</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500g</td>
<td>full fat soft goats cheese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>250g</td>
<td>full fat butter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/2</td>
<td>lit of vegetable or mushroom stock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500g</td>
<td>Carnaroli risotto rice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>grated Parmesan</td>
<td>to garnish</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Method**

1. First prepare the Fly Agaric exactly as described. Cut the cap and stalk into thin slices 3–4 mm or 1/8” thick. For each 110 g/4 oz

2. Peel and slice the Fly Agaric and Cep/Porcini (Boletus edulis)² into thin slices 3–4 mm or 1/8” thick.

3. In a heavy-based saucepan, add a little olive oil or butter. Stir in the Fly Agaric and Cep/Porcini (Boletus edulis)², stirring constantly. When the Fly Agaric² is golden brown, add the stock and bring to the boil. Stir in the Carnaroli risotto rice and simmer, stirring constantly, adding more stock as necessary. Simmer for 20–25 minutes or until the rice is tender and the mixture is creamy and thick.

4. Just before serving, stir in the goats cheese to melt and toss gently to combine. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

5. Skate and garnish with grated Parmesan. Serve immediately.

© Copyright Bushcraft & Survival Skills Magazine 2011

WILD FOOD

MAGIC MUSHROOMS

by

Fergus Drennan

Professional Forager

© Copyright Bushcraft & Survival Skills Magazine 2011

Follow Bushcraft & Survival Skills Magazine on Facebook

www.bushcraftmagazine.com
of mushroom, use 1 litre/1 1/4 pt water with 1 teaspoon of added salt. Bring water to a rolling boil. Add the sliced mushrooms. Begin timing the cooking once the water returns to a boil. Boil for 15 minutes. Drain and rinse. Set aside. Slice the Ceps and gently shallow fry or boil in a little water until tender and set aside. Bring the stock to the boil and gently cook the shallots for three minutes in the melted butter. Stir in the rice and cook, stirring for 3 minutes. Add the boiling stock a ladeful (100ml) at a time, stirring continuously until each addition of liquid has been absorbed (approx 1 minutes). Two minutes before the end add the garlic, salt and pepper as desired, and stir in the chopped spring onions and all mushrooms. Finally, mix in the soft cheese. Serve with a dusting of grated Parmesan, sprinkling of lemon juice and garnish with 1 or 2 Fly Agaric replica radishes. Because the mushroom themselves are toxic raw and, alas, lose their beautiful colour during cooking).

After rinsing place in a lightly greased tray, cover with foil and bake at 200 degrees celcius for 10 minutes. Although I’ve never done this there may be small quantities of the psychoactive chemical musczone present the cystaline structure of which breaks down above 190.

*aUsing unleached dried mushrooms that are then subsequently leached requires different treatment from that described here and is not recommended.

**Tawny Grissete Amanita fulva**

This is a common and attractive looking fungi of mixed woodland that can often be found in large quantities from June till the first frosts. Apart from knowing the relevant details of shape and size, a key identifying feature is its orange-brown cap without spots and above ring stem; nor does it have the distinct fine striations of the Panther Cap.

**The Blusher Amanita rubescens**

This common fungus can be found in deciduous and coniferous woodland from June to the first hard frosts, sometimes singly but also in small groups. The cap is rosy-brown to flesh coloured with distinct spots. The ‘blushing’ of the flesh occurs with damage and contact with air. Sometimes obstacles

**Grey Spotted Amanita Amanita excels var. spissa/A.pissia**

Found in season and locations as for The Blusher. It can by clearly distinguished from its poisonous look-a-like The Panthera Cap. A pancrea, by the former’s grey spots and striated (lined) ring and above ring stem; nor does it have the distinct fine striations at the cap margin . The Panther Cap’s white spots and leaves are more distinct volva too. Note: Panther Cap poisons rarely result in death, most making a full recovery, but are unpleasant nonetheless!

**Grey Spotted Amanita Amanita excels var. spissa/A.pissia**

Found in season and locations as for The Blusher. It can by clearly distinguished from its poisonous look-a-like The Panthera Cap. A pancrea, by the former’s grey spots and striated (lined) ring and above ring stem; nor does it have the distinct fine striations at the cap margin. The Panther Cap’s white spots and leaves are more distinct volva too. Note: Panther Cap poisonings rarely result in death, most making a full recovery, but are unpleasant nonetheless!

**Blushing Fagottinis makes 20 (2 per portion)**

**Method**

Mix the 4 eggs, oil and salt to form a firm dough – add water if necessary. Knead for 5 minutes. Wrap and chill for 30 minutes. Fry the mushrooms until well cooked, add the garlic and break in the cheese and add the cooked chopped spinach. Thoroughly combine and season and cook for a further minute or two. Roll out the dough to form a large square about 1mm thick. Cut into squares approx 10cm by 10cm. Place a heaped table spoon of the mixed filling in the centre of each. Brush the sides of each square with egg white. Fold opposite corners in and press together. Use fingers to seal all gaps. Place on an oiled baking tray and brush each parcel with egg yolk and drizzle over a little olive oil. Bake in a preheated oven at 150°C for about 10 mins or until golden brown. Serve as a starter with roasted vine tomatoes and basil or as a main course with salad and vegetables. The fagottinis can also be boiled (like pasta) for 12 with 5 at a time, stirring continuously until each addition of liquid has been absorbed (approx 1 minutes). Two minutes before the end add the garlic, salt and pepper as desired, and stir in the chopped spring onions and all mushrooms. Finally, mix in the soft cheese. Serve with a dusting of grated Parmesan, sprinkling of lemon juice and garnish with 1 or 2 Fly Agaric replica radishes. Because the mushroom themselves are toxic raw and, alas, lose their beautiful colour during cooking.

In the ground or very firm soil as it grows forth can push off all the spots and leave it very rosy coloured compared to adjacent fungi (see picture). This mushroom is toxic raw due to a component protein Rubescensylin that has a cytolytic action upon internal body cells – especially of the liver. It is denatured and rendered harmless by thorough cooking. Some people (e.g Roger Phillips) recommend boiling in water and discarding that water. If in doubt feel free to do this – this isn’t mentioned at all in most Italian Mushroom guides. I just fry it as they recommend.

**Essential reading:**


Both of the above articles can be found on my website at http://www.wildmanandfood.co.uk/pages/mushrooms.htm. Click on the Fly Agaric picture.