

The Mushroom Manual book reviews

1. "I have just finished *The Mushroom Manual* by Lorentz C. Pearson, a professor of botany, genetics, and ecology at Ricks College in Rexburg, Idaho. It's a book that taught me a valuable lesson: I'm never going to hunt the savory wild mushroom. Now, that's just a personal viewpoint, for others who read this excellent book on one of nature's tastiest foods will take the bull by the horns and learn which mushrooms to pick and those to avoid.

"The author has covered the subject about as completely as possible, and those who learn what to look for and to avoid the 'fatal five' will have plenty of delicious meals supplemented by the fruit of a colorless plant called a fungus, or more commonly, a mushroom. Pearson early on admits the safest place to hunt mushrooms is the grocery store, but he also claims once identification is learned gourmets will not be happy with the plain old grocery store types. There are dozens of delectable wild mushrooms that will delight the fancier of fine foods.

"Although there are about seven basic precautions to be taken before eating a wild mushroom, the first and most important is: 'NEVER eat a mushroom unless you are positive of its identification. And if one diligently studies this book, positive identification of at least some of the safe species can be learned. It is profusely illustrated, contains some taste-tempting recipes, mushroom families and genera, some exceptional mushroom identification keys, and a 15-page glossary that should acquaint every reader with the entire mushroom story.

"This study of mushrooms stresses safety first, but then describes over 300 species, their identification, and edibility. In addition to the 'fatal five' which you soon learn are absolute no-no's, there is a chapter on the 'foolproof four', which are the goodies in the mushroom world, and are 'so distinctive and different from all other mushrooms that there is no danger of misidentification,' at least this is the author's claim. The four are morels, puffballs, shaggy mane, and the sulfur polypore. According to Pearson, 'The Foolproof Four and the Fatal Five make up what I call the Basic Nine; know them well before going on to more difficult species.'

"Natural food lovers and those whose taste buds enjoy the flavor of mushrooms should find the choice recipes a challenge. I'll wager even those who never plan a wild mushroom hunt will want to try a few of the dishes. *The Mushroom Manual* is a book with a serious message, and if you are entertaining any hopes of becoming an authority on the wild mushroom, be sure and get a copy. It might save your life or at least prevent some uncomfortable hours of sickness because you picked and ate the wrong mushroom." (Hale G. Joy, "All About Mushrooms," *The Ellsworth American*, Ellsworth, Maine, Oct. 8, 1987)

2. "A well-written handbook for the beginner, *The Mushroom Manual* concentrates at first on four easily recognized, edible mushrooms, called 'the foolproof four'. Another chapter entitled 'the fatal five' discusses five readily recognized poisonous mushrooms, their toxins, the effect of toxins on the human body, and how to recognize the major groups of poisonous mushrooms. Dr. Pearson's philosophy--learn a few and learn them well before getting involved with the hundreds of different species in the woods--is a good approach for the beginning student. Subsequent chapters describe additional rather distinctive edible and poisonous species and present some hints on tasting mushrooms and on preparing them for the table. The final 100 pages of the book

are divided among dichotomous or multiple-choice 'keys' for identification of several hundred different mushrooms; a synopsis of the principal features of the major groups, i. e. families and genera; and a glossary.

"The author's conservative taxonomy, which uses very generally defined genera and families, causes some problems in his circumscription of families and will perplex some students. For example, the species usually placed in *Leccinum* are referred to *Boletus*, and the definition of the family Theophoraceae as 'mostly polypore-like fungi with minute pores and dark colored spores' is quite mistaken. The principal weakness in the manual lies in the illustrations. The color plate depicting spore print colors for the dark spored groups is not useful due to the poor quality. Only two mushrooms are pictured in color: the frontpiece is of *Morchella conica* and the cover is a beautiful photograph of *Suillus spectabilis*. There are about 150 species illustrated in black-and-white line drawings, which are not executed in great detail; thus, some of the illustrated species are not readily recognized.

"Those mushroom hunters who like to compare their collections with pictures may not be satisfied with this book, simply because the drawings were not meant to be used alone but along with the text. There are a few typographical errors. One worth correcting is on page 51 where 'death cap' should read 'death cup'. In the index the list of species of *Suillus* is missing.

"In summary, this book is a good introduction to the study of mushrooms which emphasizes the 'safety-first' approach to collecting, eating, and identifying wild mushrooms." (J. Ginns, *The Canadian Field-Naturalist*, vol. 103, December 28, 1989)