Wild Mushrooms

Well over 1,000 species of wild mushrooms have been described in the state of Connecticut. The word mushroom includes any conspicuous fleshy fungus. Often times, people use the word ‘toadstool’ interchangeably with wild mushroom. The word ‘toadstool’ is commonly used to refer to poisonous or inedible mushrooms but has no scientific merit.

When characterizing mushrooms found in the wild, field information that should be taken into consideration can be summarized as follows:

1. Presence/absence of universal or partial veil
2. Gill attachment: or in what manner gills are attached or not attached to the stalk
3. Mass color of the spores in a spore print 
4. Cap characteristics: shape, size, color, special features, fleshy or tough
5. Stalk characteristics: texture, length, diameter, shape
6. Grouping of mushrooms: single, loosely scattered, clustered
7. Habitat: lawn, grassy area, growing from downed wood, base or on of a living tree, on the ground in deciduous or coniferous woods

There is a challenge in finding certain mushrooms during their ‘season’ when they suddenly appear and almost as suddenly disappear. One must carefully and extensively study the characteristics of both edible and inedible species before consumption. There is no simple test to rule out dangerous mushrooms from the small selection of edible mushrooms. Here are some resources available to the mushroom enthusiast:

Connecticut Valley Mycological Society


Mushrooms Demystified, by David Arora. Ten Speed Press, Berkeley CA.

University of Connecticut does not identify mushrooms and strongly urges the public not to consume wild mushrooms unless you are able to identify it with one hundred percent certainty and know it is safe for eating. Even safe mushrooms can cause allergic reactions in some people. Strictly avoid any mushroom that looks like an Amanita, all little brown mushrooms, and all false morels. Should you become ill from eating wild mushrooms, contact a physician or the nearest hospital.
Pictured above Morchella, the true morels, a popular genus of edible mushrooms found in coniferous forests. When gathering morels, care must be taken to distinguish them from the poisonous 'false morels', which are not safe for consumption.

(photograph from thegreatmorel.com)

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