

Mushrooms' Merits Many, Can Even Be Intoxicating

By OLIVE DICKASON

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One answer at least to the meat shortage today is to be found in many back yards, most vacant lots, and incidental spots of the country's fields and woods.

According to specialists on the subject, mushrooms are a valuable source of many of the food values found in meat, and most wild mushrooms are edible. Canadians, however, are inclined to ignore them completely as a source of food.

"Most people are frightened because of the few that are poisonous," said Dr. Rene Pomerleau of Laval University, Quebec, in an interview yesterday. "Yet it is a simple matter to learn enough about mushrooms to avoid the dangerous varieties."

Giving Lectures

Dr. Pomerleau is at the Botanical Garden this week giving lectures on mushrooms. The course will include field trips about Montreal in a hunt for the fungus-type growth that is to be found almost anywhere.

"Some of the weirdest looking mushrooms are quite edible," smiled Dr. Pomerleau. He picked up a bright orange specimen from his display of 50 types to be found here and at Quebec. It looked like nothing so much as a piece of golden coral. "This is the coral mushroom," he said. "Very tasty, and good for you, too."

"Over there is the shaggy-mane," he continued, pointing to a white something that might have stepped out of a fairy story illustration. "The stalks of that mushroom are

too tough to eat, but the tops can be cut off and cooked. They are delicious."

Or what about a cheap jag? Dr. Pomerleau said that certain types of mushrooms, "moderately poisonous", will give a similar effect to alcoholic drinks.

"In Siberia such mushrooms used to be sold for that purpose," he said with a twinkle. "It was a cheap way for the poor peasants to forget their troubles."

There are about 800 varieties of mushrooms in Quebec province, he continued. Of these, three types are deadly poisonous, and 100 are moderately poisonous.

He admitted there is a trick to identifying the good from the bad. The fungus' biological characteristics have to be studied . . . its shape, color, the presence of "gills" and so on. Some of the most unlikely looking specimens are perfectly edible, while others, such as the "death angel," look nice but are deadly.

Death Cup

The latter mentioned menace is tall, with the well-known umbrella-shaped top, and a "death cup" at the bottom.

Dr. Pomerleau waxed enthusiastic about the art of gathering mushrooms. "It is an intellectual pursuit that offers challenge," he declared. "The forests are beautiful, and you never know where you will find your quarry. They might be in one place one day, gone the next. Not only is it a practical hobby, it is a satisfying one."

He is a forest pathologist, professor of the department of lands and forests at Laval University. Dr. Pomerleau discovered the Dutch elm disease that is causing such deprivations among Canada's elms. A book of his on Canadian mushrooms has been recently published here in both English and French. Currently Dr. Pomerleau is working on a color movie film on the fungi which will be released here next winter.