

A Foolproof Few Edible Mushrooms;

Developed for New England

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Foraging mushrooms for food is both an exciting journey of discovery AND often anxiety-provoking for the beginner, as you seek to separate the edible species from those that may sicken. The risk for a toxic mushroom is real and we are seeing increasing numbers of toxic reactions as foraging edibles becomes more popular. An approach I recommend is to begin with those mushrooms that are considered somewhat foolproof. Mushrooms that are common, easily to identify, without toxic lookalikes, and with an established history of edibility and use. The following mushrooms are a group of good edible “Foolproof” species for this region. You must be completely certain about the species before ever eating a mushroom. Consider taking a foraging class or workshop and invest in good field guides or use reputable online resources. ***When in doubt, throw it out!***

****This guide is not meant to be the sole basis for identifying mushrooms or determining their edibility. Make sure you have the skills and the resources for responsibly identifying mushrooms.***

GOLDEN CHANTERELLE (*Cantharellus cibarius* clade) is the most commonly collected and eaten wild mushroom in the Northeastern US, and a prized edible here and in countries on 4 continents. This is a forest mushroom found from mid-summer through the fall, growing as a mycorrhizal partner with several different conifers and hardwood trees. It is distinctive for its golden yellow color, vase shape and the blunted gills that occasionally fork as they run down the stem. A basket of them give off a distinct apricot smell. Chanterelles have a mild and pleasant flavor that is brought out by butter or cream. They are well matched with eggs, cream sauces and mild meats like chicken or fish. Preserve them by a gentle sauté and then freezing. **Beware of the toxic Jack O’lantern**, it fruits intense clusters, while the chanterelle fruits singly or in scattered troops. There are several smaller chanterelle species that are also common, edible and very good.



BLACK TRUMPET (*Craterellus fallax*) is also in the Chanterelle family and has a similar overall vase shape, but this brown-gray-almost black mushroom is entirely hollow, a thin-fleshed open horn of a mushroom. Find them growing singly or in clusters trooping across moist areas of the forest growing in symbiosis with oak, hemlock, and beech trees. The dark gray color and low stature make this mushroom very difficult to spot in the brown leaf litter on the forest floor. If you see one, stop and carefully look around; they rarely appear singly, but are more likely to be scattered across the area. The French call this mushroom the poor man's truffle in homage to the very rich taste and earthy smell. The only reason it is not the most popular wild edible mushroom is that it is hard to find. Look for them from July through October during periods following heavy or prolonged rain. They are versatile in cooking adding rich flavor to eggs, meats, risottos, flatbreads... If you have too many to use right away, dry them for year around use.



MAITAKE (*Grifola frondosa*) also known as **Hen of the Woods** is a relatively common fall mushroom highly sought for the table and also for the medicinal tool chest. Look for large (8-18 inch) clusters of overlapping gray to brown spoon-shaped fronds on the ground at the base of mature oak trees in September and October. It also occasionally grows beside Beech, Ash and other hardwoods, but primarily on oaks. If you find it, make sure you find the tree, next year, because on a living Oak, it will fruit annually for many years. A single cluster can weigh 20 pounds or more, so it represents a significant bounty of healthy tasty food. Maitake contain a number of long chain polysaccharides glucans with strong anti-tumor activity and is being used as a treatment or adjunct treatment for cancers in other countries. Concentrated extracts are available as immunosupplements. Simply sautéed with garlic and tamari over rice, this is a meal to remember.



MORELS (*Morchella esculenta* group and *M. elata* group) are distinctive mushrooms fruiting in the spring. The yellow Morel, *M. esculenta* appears about the time the apple trees and lilacs are in bloom; the black morel (*M. elata*) a couple of weeks earlier. Morels are uncommon in most parts of Maine and New Hampshire forests, but common in some parts of Eastern Quebec, Vermont, Massachusetts and further south. The pitted gray-tan-yellow cap and pale cream stem are distinctive, as is the completely hollow interior. Find yellow morels in old apple orchards, with dying or dead elms and in rich forest with ash. They like disturbance and can sometimes fruit abundantly following a forest fire or cutting. Their flavor is rich and deep, and stronger in mature mushrooms.. For preservation, it is best to dry them (if you ever find an excess). They add deep flavor to eggs, risottos, stuffed and baked.... Beware of mistaking the toxic False Morel!

OYSTER MUSHROOMS (*Pleurotus ostreatus*, *P. pulmonarius* and *P. populinus*) are common gilled wood-rotters in our forests, and grow on the wood of a wide variety of deciduous tree species. Find them on dead standing trees, logs, and stumps, and on dead portions of living trees. In the late spring and early summer we collect Oysters primarily on Aspens and these are *P. populinus*. (M) In the fall we find *P. ostreatus* (L) most common on either old Sugar Maples or elms, and in the heat of summer, *P. pulmonarius* (R) comes on maple, beech and other hardwoods. Oyster Mushrooms are a good safe edible mushroom and one we can enjoy at the table and benefit from their medicinal value at the same time. Oysters have been shown to contain immune-stimulating polysaccharides with considerable anti-tumor activity. A Lovastatin-like compound has been isolated and may be responsible for the demonstrated ability to lower plasma and liver cholesterol levels. Oyster mushrooms freeze well and can be dried and used as a powder. Also easily cultivated!

*P. ostreatus**P. populinus**P. pulmonarius*

SHAGGY MANE (*Coprinus comatus*) appears about the time of the first frost and is a harbinger of autumn. Find them in areas of disturbance where soil has been moved around and organic matter buried. They like pastures and farm yards, especially where waste vegetation was buried. These are white and tan bullet-shaped missiles in lawns and open areas arising 6-12 inches out of the ground. Their long hollow stem is covered by the cap when young, and then elongates, showing a ring that often falls off. The caps never open, but as the mushrooms mature, the cap turns black and melts away from the base upward, giving it the group name Inky Cap. Pick them when young and still white and cook them the same day as they quickly blacken. They have a fine flavor and add excellence to a cream soup, or simple sauté with butter and seasonings on toast or over fish.



PUFFBALLS (*Calvatia cyathiformis* & *C.gigantea*, and various *Lycoperdons*) The first mushroom many new foragers eat is a young firm puffball with its interior pure white. There are many species of puffballs in several genera; rounded globes from an inch to 2 feet in diameter with a thin skin covering the interior that matures into a mass of spores. Puffballs are most abundant in late summer and early fall fruiting in open ground for the larger ones, and usually on wood or soil duff in the forest for the small ones. They are collected and eaten when young and firm, before the white interior softens and changes color. Beware of the poisonous, tough-skinned *Scleroderma* puffballs with thick outer skin and gray to black centers.



Purple-spored puffball: 3-8. Inches across
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Gem-studded puffball 1-2 inches
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Giant Puffball in Prime stage (8-10 in)



Pear-Shaped Puffball on rotted wood

LION'S MANE or COMB TOOTH, (*Hericium coraloides*, *H. americanum*, *H. erinaceus*). These mushrooms are known by many common names and appears in 3 slightly different forms (and species) in the Northeast. The Lion's Mane is an unmistakable mushroom that appears as a cascade of small white icicle teeth attached to wood on the side of a tree, or on standing or downed hardwood, usually Beech, Birch or Maple. Find it in the moist days after a period of rain in the mid-autumn woods and pick it when it is still pure white and firm. This is a great edible mushroom that also is an excellent immune stimulant due to the glucans it contains. It also has erinacines, known to stimulate the production of Nerve Growth Factor. It is being studied for addressing nerve damage, cognitive decline and as a possible treatment for dementia. As food, it makes an excellent chowder and has a gentle flavor some liken to seafood.



CHICKEN OF THE WOODS OR SULPHUR SHELF (*Laetiporus sulphureus* & *L. cincinnatus*).

These fruiting bodies leap out visually in the forest, with their vibrant cream-yellow undersides and orange top colors and their significant size. They are found fruiting on wood or on the ground from buried wood in the summer and autumn. They are wood rotters on dead wood or the dead heartwood of living trees; most commonly oak, but also ash, cherry and occasionally others. If you find it on a conifer, do not eat it; it is a related species and causes nausea and vomiting. Collect and use only young, tender specimens and cook them well to avoid sickening; some people do not tolerate these mushrooms. They retain their vibrant color when cooked, so use them in stir-fries, soups, stews or cooked and added to a salad. To preserve excess, saute and freeze.

