

## Information Sheet: **WILD MUSHROOMS**



The toxic "Fly Agaric"  
(*Amanita muscaria*)

Spring signals the start of mushroom growing season. Many wild Virginia mushrooms are edible and delicious, but some are deadly, and the differences between them may be so slight, even an experienced *mycologist* (mushroom scientist) can make a mistake.

Mushrooms are not plants. They are the reproductive part of a *fungus*, an organism that "eats" dead plants and animals. The toxins in mushrooms are chemicals that are thought to have evolved to prevent animals from eating them.

*"All mushrooms are edible; but some only once." ~Croatian proverb*

There are no simple guidelines to identify poisonous mushrooms. When in doubt, it is best not to eat what you have picked. Folklore presents many **myths** about poisonous mushrooms:

MYTH: Poisonous mushrooms always have bright, flashy colors.

TRUTH: *Some toxic species are pure white or otherwise bland in color.*

MYTH: Snails, insects, or other animals won't eat poisonous mushrooms.

TRUTH: *The toxins may be harmless to other organisms. Evidence that something else is eating the mushroom does not mean it is safe for humans to eat.*

MYTH: Toxic mushrooms turn black if touched by silver or by an onion.

TRUTH: *All mushrooms may darken or "bruise" as they wither or are damaged.*

MYTH: Toxic mushrooms smell and taste horrible.

TRUTH: *Some toxic mushrooms are reported to taste very good.*

MYTH: Any mushroom becomes safe if you cook it enough.

TRUTH: *Neither cooking, canning, freezing, or drying will make a poisonous mushroom safe to eat.*



The "Destroying Angel" mushroom  
(*Amanita virosa*): one bite could be fatal.

Symptoms of mushroom poisoning are sometimes delayed by hours or even days after eating, when the toxins have begun to attack the liver and other organs. Certain species can cause hallucinations, dizziness, drowsiness, dilated pupils, or muscle spasms. Other species cause severe vomiting and diarrhea, and sharp abdominal pain. The most dangerous species found in Virginia belong to the *Amanita* genus; even one bite can be life-threatening.

**If you believe someone may have eaten an unsafe mushroom, seek medical help immediately. Do not wait for symptoms to develop. Contact the Blue Ridge Poison Center for guidance: 1-800-222-1222.**