



## A NEW EARTHSTAR SERIES

By Dr. Walt Sundberg, Mycologist,  
Professor Emeritus, Southern Illinois University  
Chief Mycologist (Scientific Advisor),  
Missouri Mycological Society

## January Bi-Monthly Meeting Spruce Fraser talks about Mushrooms and Cookbooks

By Spruce Fraser

# Building your “Mushroom Memory”

*Do you remember when you first went on a mushroom foray? Why did you start? Was it curiosity, love of nature, or just the nature of the hunt? What were your goals? What did you know about mushrooms before going? Answers to these questions probably hinge on where you grew up (city or rural), and your family background, their interests, and activities.*



*Amanita rubescens*

Growing up in San Francisco, and in spite of the fact that for years, we spent parts of our summers among the redwoods near Santa Cruz, I wasn't introduced to wild mushrooms until my junior and senior years in college. I was truly surprised to learn that mushrooms were abundant, but previously unseen by me, in those same places where I spent some of my youth! I still vividly recall my first fall/early winter of trying to learn and recall the names of the mushrooms I found the past year.

I know that many of us go through various stages and processes in our learning about mushrooms. At first, many are interested in learning which are edible and, for safety's sake, easy to recognize with certainty. For some of us, this is “good enough”. But because of curiosity, mushroom beauty, etc., many of us eventually begin a quest to learn more—to go beyond just the recognition of the “foolproof five” or “sensible seven.” At that point, species recognition—remembering and recognizing the salient features and name of each species—becomes more important. This creates problems for many of us since the “prey” is seasonal. How does one accomplish such goals?

For this purpose, I am initiating this “intermittent continuing series” of Earthstar articles to suggest ways that might enhance your success in making visible progress.

Many of us think of mushroom learning as something that takes place only (or mostly) during the warmer months, the fruiting season. However, the winter/pre-spring periods offer excellent opportunities to learn via

“arm chair” mycology. Herein I offer two important suggestions. Both should be done frequently at all times of year. Start NOW!

1. Whenever possible, review the illustrations of mushrooms and other fleshy fungi in your personal library—books, mushroom magazines, etc. Because of your familiarity with the pictures, it will ultimately be possible for you to sometimes recognize and/or identify fungi you have never seen before when you come across them in the field. This is true “arm-chair mycology.”
2. Begin to make a personal “life-list” of fungi you KNOW and/or have seen in the field or at forays. **List first by scientific names** and include common names if this helps you. If possible, use a computer spread sheet like Microsoft Excel. Such a list can be continually modified and updated. **PRINT THE LIST OUT.** Review it over and over again, and modify it often as your knowledge of mushroom species increases. Most important: Carry it with you and use it to jog your memory on field trips! You will be surprised at how much more you will soon remember with the help of your list.

photos by Ken Gilberg

On a refreshingly cool Tuesday evening in January, I displayed the entire mushroom cookbook and identification collection of the Saint Louis Public Library, Central Library, where I work as a Librarian. With both an academic and personal background in environmental studies, it was great to share my expertise and experience on collecting and preparing mushrooms home and abroad. I supported this by a display of mushroom cookbooks.

I talked how my family discovered Shaggy Manes (*Coprinus comatus*) along roadside and suburban lawns in Montreal, Quebec. We would fry onions and the non-inky Shaggy Manes, add seasoning, then fill plastic ice cube trays. Once frozen, we would “pop” them out into plastic freezer bags and put them back into our freezer for a nice steak dinner a few months later, in the midst of a December snowstorm. Ken Gilberg also recalled finding them in Brooklyn. Others shared their mushroom collecting and cooking experiences as well.

While I studied the growth of Crowberries (*Empetrum* spp.) in Finnish Lapland, I was thrilled to discover, literally hundreds, Euro Scaber-Stalk (*Leccinum quercinum*) untouched by fly larvae (i.e. wormy mushrooms.) This orange capped mushroom grows where you find Birch (*Betula* spp.). The Sami would always leave these mushrooms for their reindeer to eat. It was a wonderful experience to collect them during the day, to clean them and thread them on necklaces to dry overnight in herbarium drying racks. Before the evening was over, many were fried in butter and served on top of Finn Crisp crackers.

After a pleasant evening of reminiscing, we finished off with a little tasting. The recipe for my Yummy Mushroom Appetizers is elsewhere in this newsletter.

All agreed, it was a delicious way to end the evening. I appreciated being able to share with MOMS members, both our Library collection and my own mushroom experiences.

**Make a personal life list and use it to review over and over again. And most important, carry it with you to jog your memory on field trips. You'll soon develop mushroom memory.**