

Connecticut-Westchester Mycological Association

Spores Illustrated

**SUMMER
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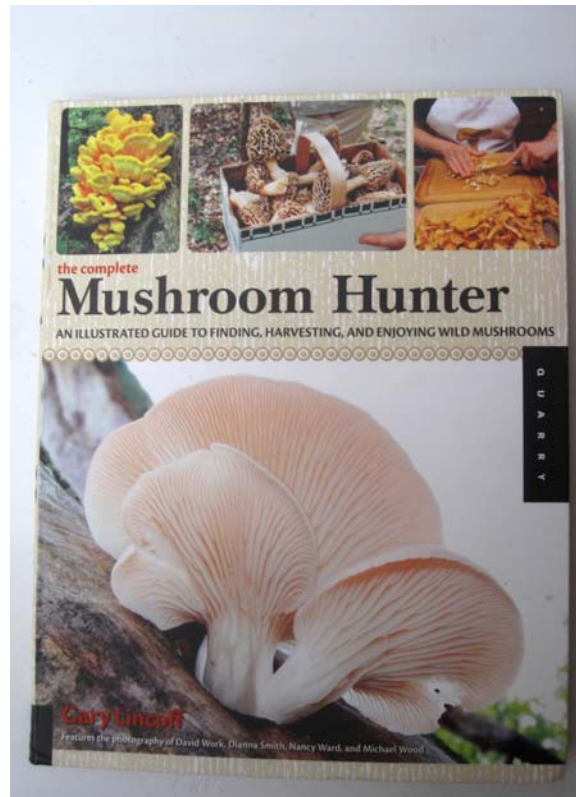
Northeast Mycological Federation Foray 2010

Sept. 23rd to 26th

by Dianna Smith

The Northeast Mycological Federation (NEMF) is holding its 2010 Sam Ristich Foray at Soyuzivka, Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Center, in Kerhonkson, NY. COMA is one of the clubs hosting the foray in addition to the Long Island Mycological Club, the Mid-Hudson Mycological Association, and the New York Mycological Society.

As you may know, the NEMF 2010 Foray's double and triple rooms sold out by the end of February. There are however, several dormitory beds as well as a limited number of day passes available. To secure a place at this fabulous foray, contact the Registrar Paul Sadowski at nemf2010@verizon.net. I also hope that you will volunteer to help us with leading walks, mycophagy preparation or the socials hour. To volunteer, contact me at diannasmith@optonline.net. Come join the fun, make new friends and take advantage of the opportunity to learn from some of the best mycologists in the world.



The Complete Mushroom Hunter: An Illustrated guide to Finding, Harvesting, and Enjoying Wild Mushrooms
by Gary Lincoff, Quayside Publishing Group, 2010

Review by Rena Wertzer

I have just had the pleasure of spending a few enjoyable hours with Gary Lincoff's newest book, The Complete Mushroom Hunter. This book is a must for anyone who ever entertained the idea of eating wild mushrooms. It is a delight to the eye and is both informative and entertaining. As Lincoff tells us:

When it comes to eating wild mushrooms, there seems to be two kinds of people: those who choose only to eat mushrooms known to be edible and those who choose to eat mushrooms not known to be poisonous. Which kind are you?

You may assure yourself that you belong in the first group, that you would never eat a mushroom you didn't know for certain is edible. When you've been out hunting mushrooms all day, and you haven't found what you've been looking for, but you do find a lot of something else, something you think is not known to be poisonous, what do you do? The answer is stay out of the kitchen until you have finished reading this book!

After a careful reading of The Complete Mushroom Hunter, the reader knows which mushrooms to pick for cooking and which to avoid. We learn how to distinguish the good edible mushroom from its poisonous look-alikes, and we get the answer to the question, “Can I eat this?” In addition, we receive guidance on where to look for edible mushrooms, when to look, and how to look. Lincoff does not leave us holding the basket. He guides the reader home to the kitchen, sharing many recipes that he and his wife have prepared and tested.

And for those of us who don't do a lot of cooking and eating of mushrooms, the book remains great fun and full of fascinating information about fungi throughout the world. Lincoff touches many points—historically, culturally, and geographically, and we get a taste of the role of mushrooms in cultures and kitchens around the world. Lincoff is always the scientist, but he is also a great story-teller, and entertainer. I smiled, reading about his exploits. My favorite story was “Apartment Building Shaggy Manes,” about his run-in with a possessive city lady.

The Complete Mushroom Hunter is a delight to the eyes. The photographs are gorgeous. Many were contributed by COMA president, Dianna Smith. We are accustomed to seeing wonderful photographs of mushrooms since they are so photogenic, but these are exceptional. Many of the photos in this book are life-sized and just pop off the page.

This book is both a reference tool and a page-turner. It is organized in a logical fashion for both the novice and the expert. The first chapter discusses the culture of mushroom hunting. Lincoff divides the world into mycophobes, generally the English speaking countries, and mycophiles, people from Continental Europe, the Chinese, and South Koreans with some complex exceptions.

Later chapters cover the basics of mushroom hunting, the what, where, and how to of picking and cooking mushrooms. The heart of the book is identifying them, and the pictures help. A very extensive section on poisonous mushrooms starts with a complete chart of where they are found and when they are picked, followed up with pictures and descriptions of the symptoms experienced with their consumption. No book on picking mushrooms would be complete without a description of psychedelic/psychotherapeutic as well as medicinal mushrooms, and the book does not disappoint.

COMA is planning to order copies of the book to sell at the NEMF foray and at the fall meetings. The discounted price will be \$20. If you think you will be getting one or more copies (holiday gifts for friends and family), please send an email to Renawertzer@hotmail.com so we can estimate how many copies to order for members.

Mushroom University: Learning to See by JJ Murphy

This year, COMA's Mushroom University was designed to help students see details of fungi that would be easy to overlook in the field. While our focus was on non-gilled basidiomycetes—chanterelles, jelly fungi, coral fungi, toothed fungi and gasteromycetes—many of the lessons we learned apply to all kinds of mushrooms. Most of us will be in the field somewhere, collecting and observing fungi. We will have two questions about everything we find: What is this mushroom, and can I eat it?

Field guides are the only tools available to most aspiring mycologists. Some of us might have microscopes or vials of chemicals. Few of us have access to DNA sequencing resources. Our best tool is our own senses, a list of basic questions, and the ability to take notes. Before we get to taste, we'll need to use our eyes, hands, and noses to describe details of the mushroom.

We have to answer a series of questions:

- What does the outside of the mushroom look like?
- What is the color, texture and other details of the cap, underside, stem, if any, and details like whether there is bruising.
- What is the color of the mature spore mass?
- What does the inside of the mushroom look like, when cut open?
- Where is it growing? On a grassy lawn, in or on leaf litter, or on wood?
- What trees are growing near it?

Most mushrooms are either decomposers or mycorrhizal, meaning the mushrooms grow in association with a specific genus of tree. Armed with this basic information, we can narrow the possibilities enough to read the field guide descriptions of the mushroom we think we have. It's much easier to begin with odd shaped mushrooms, like puffballs, chanterelles, tooth fungi or coral mushrooms. These mushrooms have few, if any, confusing look-alikes. Knowing that these tools are applicable to study any group of mushrooms gives me confidence when trying to sort out more complicated gilled fungi.

Gary Lincoff is one of the best teachers I've ever met. Any New York City mycologist knows that what you cannot find in the high-end gourmet shops, you can find in Chinatown. We examined, touched, sniffed and otherwise handled samples of the mushroom of the day. After that, we prepared and ate the rest of the featured mushroom. Most of us agree that the chanterelles grown in California and shipped to a high end New York City shop are nowhere near as tasty as the fresh-picked ones. But the dried and rehydrated Chinatown tooth fungus, *Hericeum erinaceus*, was pretty tasty. Fellow student, Amy Wong, can read Chinese, so we learned that the information on the package is less than accurate. When probing Chinatown, I plan to be accompanied by a mycologist or a translator.

Spring has finally sprung and some of the early mushrooms have fruited south of here. I know from previous Mushroom U classes, that the time spent studying during the winter will pay off in my improved ability to both find and identify a greater variety of mushrooms.

Why Do We Do it – and Just What Are We Doing?

By Gary Lincoff

What are mushroom clubs about? It's not really about what's edible or what can make you high, not that those questions don't come up over and over.....

When I took a group to northern India some years ago, we met with local mycologists and their graduate students and went hunting mushrooms in places with romantic names like Kashmir. We asked about local mushroom clubs because we wanted to meet non-professionals who just went out in groups to hunt mushrooms, the way it's done in much of Europe and Japan and here in the States. We were told that mushroom hunting was only for the middle classes, that India was a poor country and that people had no leisure time to follow such pursuits. Whatever the truth of that statement, however, what interests me is what brings people together to hunt mushrooms in organized groups. Here in the States, despite our affinity for being joiners, for joining all kinds of groups for all kinds of reasons, very few people are actually members of mushroom clubs. If you travel a lot and go out with mushroom clubs around the country, or if you attend regional or national mushroom forays, it doesn't take many years before you know most of the people in those clubs. New people join, of course, and some leave for various reasons, but there's a known community of mushroom hunters who know one another, who seem to enjoy or tolerate one another's company, and who look forward to seeing others on mushroom hunts from year to year. It's like being in an extended family where you have no familial responsibility, just the pleasure of reunion.

There may be a hundred or a thousand times as many people in the States who hunt mushrooms on their own and never connect with any club as there are members of mushroom clubs, but we rarely run into them on our mushroom walks. When we do, we often discover that they're immigrants from Italy or Russia or South Korea and that their mushroom skills are far more advanced than their language skills. They are clearly hunting mushrooms to eat. Sometimes you see elderly gentlemen with sticks and paper bags looking for Hen of the woods, or small family groups of Asians looking for matsutake, or busloads of people looking for one particular mushroom, like the Russians who go to the Cape to collect *Leccinum*.

Mushroom clubs, however, are not eating societies and nor are they dens of drug users hunting magic mushrooms. Even if "is it edible" is the first thing you ask on a mushroom walk, or "can you get high" is what you really want to know about this or that mushroom, what keeps most people coming on mushroom club walks is not about dinner or getting stoned. What brings people out into the woods, in the heat and humidity of summer and the chill of fall, in the midst of so many insects and ticks, and insect and tick-borne diseases, in the presence of rattlesnakes and copperheads, in the certainty of an eventual rash from poison ivy (in the east) or poison oak (in the west), is most certainly not about dinner. It's not about hiking, either. People can hike better if they're not constantly stopping to look at mushrooms. Nor is it like after a war when food is scarce and people are forced to hunt mushrooms to survive. Not only do mushroom club members appear to be especially well-fed individuals, but even if what they really want are choice edible wild mushrooms, most of the best of these can now be purchased at farmer's markets or in upscale groceries. There's no need to get sweaty and muddy and

bitten up just to get a basketful of mushrooms. There's not even any need to risk getting poisoned anymore. Something else is at stake.

One mushroom hunter told me he went to forays to see old friends. If he wanted mushrooms, he hunted on his own. Many of us are like him. We know our 'spots,' the places where we can find the mushrooms we want to harvest. Club mushroom walks are often places of great distraction. You get yourself involved in conversations and you forget to look for mushrooms. No one wants to go home with an empty basket, but even if the goal is to fill the basket with choice edibles, mushroom club hunters are far more often disappointed than satisfied.

So, what's going on? Why are we out there beating the bushes? Why are we so interested in weather reports, like where it has rained recently? Why are we willing to go to places that seem manifestly less likely to produce lots of mushrooms, like, say, Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, than other places that are reliably rewarding year after year? Why are so many of us willing to go so far to hunt for mushrooms that we are more likely to find closer to home? What is that hunger that takes us out to hunt for mushrooms in the first place? Some of us couldn't care less about edibility, and even fewer care (or say they care) about getting high.

Freud is said to have taken his family out mushroom hunting on weekends, but he doesn't appear to have written about the psychodynamics of it. Others have and have suggested that we are acting out an archetype, a journey into the wilderness looking for the Promised Land (read, for example, chanterelles), or an unarticulated attempt by urban and suburban people to reconnect with the land or with an archaic hunting and gathering way of life, if only for a few hours at a time. Maybe you know exactly why you hunt mushrooms, and in particular, why you choose to do it in groups, with a schedule of where to go on which date. If it were just for social reasons, there are far easier ways to connect with other people than stumbling about in the woods, complaining of the heat or the bugs or no mushrooms.

It's a hot day in July. It hasn't rained much the past week or so, and yet a dozen or more people show up to walk through a woods looking for mushrooms. Every little mushroom find is exciting to someone on the walk. Things so small they are even difficult to hold and look at can become objects of intense interest, even affection. Sometimes with a hand lens they appear to be quite beautiful. Sometimes a mushroom has a distinctive fragrance that entrances even if it's not edible. Sometimes mushrooms stop us in our tracks because they are so colorful, so plentiful, so curious or so beloved. Even destroying angels can take your breath away, even without eating them. Edibility is beside the point. We are seeing something that means more to us than the oak trees nearby. We can't really say what it is that it means, just that it is somehow meaningful, and we feel grateful for having seen it. I see people walking past bins of beautiful wild mushrooms in the markets. They don't do more than give them a passing glance. Why do these same mushrooms immobilize us when we see them in the woods, or set us on them like people who haven't eaten in days. And this is especially perplexing if we know that what we've just found isn't even edible? Or rare? Or even beautiful? It's just another mushroom.

What do you think is going on here? Send your thoughts to me (Gary@noahsquark.com) and we'll discuss this in a future issue.

Fungi in the News by Dianna Smith

FUNGI: Alternative to Styrofoam

If you read Paul Stamets' book, *Mycelium Running*, you are aware that researchers and start up companies are finding more uses for fungi than food for humans. One company called Evocative located in Green Island, NY, has been cultivating mycelium to create a green alternative to Styrofoam, which is used in housing insulation as well as packaging. The mycelium consumes the cooked empty seed husks of cotton and rice, agricultural waste that is normally destined for the trash. The dense mycelium, which grows in molds shaped for their ultimate function, is apparently sturdy enough to be used in place of wood beams. Best of all, it is completely recyclable. Just toss in a compost pile! To learn more about the company and its mission go to www.ecovatedesign.com/ecocradle/. They also have a YouTube video at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=jnM3-grs9ck.

FUNGI: The Gulf Oil Spill

With the ongoing oil spill catastrophe in the Gulf, many of us have been trying to learn about the various methods available to contain and remediate the problems associated with the long-term effects of crude oil floating in our oceans, contaminating our shores and smothering wildlife. With this in mind, I scanned the internet to find out whatever I could about fungi and oil bioremediation. The most interesting article I came across was by Paul Stamets entitled "The Petroleum Problem," written in response to the spill. Oyster mushroom mycelium, especially in association with compost of wood chips and garden waste, has been shown to be effective in breaking down oil-saturated soils. More mycelium is required than is currently available to have much of an impact on the massive scale of this disaster. That is no reason to do nothing. Stamets calls for greater public awareness of the benefits of utilizing fungi in bioremediation, and an increase in public funding to promote research and the creation of composting and myco-remediation centers established in populous areas where they would be available and ready to respond to environmental challenges. To read the article, log onto http://www.fungi.com/mycotech/petroleum_problem.html.

Deadline for Articles for Fall *Spores Illustrated*: August 15th

Please send Gary Lincoff your response to his article on P. 6



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