

NEWS RELEASE

Media Contacts: Dr. Larry Grand, 919/515-2667 or larry_grand@ncsu.edu
Kathleen Angione, 919/515-3470 or
keangion@unity.ncsu.edu
Mick Kulikowski, News Services, 919/515-3470 or
mick_kulikowski@ncsu.edu

July 7, 2003

In Backyards and on Lawns, There's Fungus Among Us

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Like uninvited guests at a summer barbecue, mushrooms are popping up in backyards across North Carolina. Heavy rains and mild temperatures have caused an abundance of mushrooms on lawns, trees and other landscapes, creating a potential household hazard.

Several species of poisonous mushrooms grow in North Carolina that, if eaten, can cause anything from upset stomach to death, says Dr. Larry Grand, a mycologist and professor of plant pathology at North Carolina State University. There are no cures for mushroom poisoning.



Amanita virosa mushroom

"I haven't received any human calls yet this summer," Grand says, referring to inquiries about small children accidentally eating wild mushrooms. "But there are almost always some of those." He's already received inquiries from worried pet owners who caught their dogs munching on mushrooms.

In most cases, a person would have to eat more than the top, or cap, of a poisonous mushroom to cause serious illness. But some species are so toxic that ingesting a single cap could kill you. Some of the more deadly mushrooms occurring in North Carolina include the destroying angel (*Amanita virosa*) and the galerina (*Galerina autumnalis*).

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Mushrooms 2

There is no universal rule for distinguishing poisonous from edible mushrooms, warns Grand. Common beliefs that poisonous mushrooms exhibit certain colors or markings are untrue, he says, and he cautions people against eating any unidentified mushrooms.



Galerina autumnalis mushroom

If someone does ingest a potentially poisonous mushroom, Grand recommends calling a doctor first. Next, induce vomiting – preferably using an emetic, or an agent that stimulates the nervous system, like the plant extract Ipecac. Collect the vomited material and a sample of the mushroom eaten, including the base, in a paper bag or cup. Store these items in a refrigerator until an expert can identify them.

There are no fungicides or chemical sprays that will permanently eradicate mushrooms from domestic landscapes, says Grand. “You can pick them,” he suggests, “but they’re likely to come back.”

A mushroom is the reproductive body of a fungus, similar to the blossom of a flower, except the mushroom reproduces via wind-blown spores. After landing on the ground, the spores are washed down into the soil by percolating water and begin to germinate, producing a mass of threadlike filaments called hyphae. Eventually, the hyphae fuse with those of another mushroom population, resulting in a new reproductive body, or mushroom.

Without adequate moisture, a mushroom may not form for several years, even though hyphae remain underground. However, mushrooms will grow in abundance provided there is enough moisture, and there has been plenty of rain this year – more than a 90 percent increase in the average statewide precipitation, according to Ryan Boyles at the State Climate Office on NC State’s Centennial Campus.

But mushrooms and other fungi aren’t all bad. “They’re actually beneficial,” says Grand. Fungi are responsible for breaking down the majority of organic matter, he explains. “Without fungi, we’d be knee-deep in twigs, leaves and cut grass.”

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