

# Cornell Cooperative Extension Erie County

## Wild Mushroom Questions

*By John Whitney, Agriculture Educator, CCE Erie*

“What kind of mushroom is this?” “Is it edible?” Those are two frequent questions coming through the Cornell Cooperative Extension Master Gardener’s Hotline and showing up in e-mail and social media inquiries, particularly this time of year. These questions are best covered by the experts rather than by CCE Master Gardeners. Wild mushrooms and other fungi should never be collected and eaten unless identified by an expert/experienced mycologist or mushroom forager.

That said, there seems to be a resurgence of interest wild mushrooms. In addition to assembling a good set of field guides and tools, many people find it helpful to learn both identification and preparation directly from experienced practitioners. While we often look to the internet for answers these days, and there are certainly many very helpful websites and references, photographic collections, and guides, these don’t replace in-person training and the proper hands-on identification techniques. Accurate identification usually requires digging up, breaking off, or cutting into the specimen in question. A further complication is that many edible mushrooms have inedible or toxic look-alikes. Plus, some people have sensitivities or allergies.

Learn about spore prints and mushroom terminology, biology, and anatomy. Unless you have the time and inclination to really learn about safe wild mushroom harvesting, it is probably best to stick with mushrooms from the produce section of your local grocery, cooperative, mushroom grower, or farmers market while enjoying seeing and maybe photographing mushrooms in their natural settings.

Mushroom harvesting is often prohibited on public lands, although it is generally allowed on State and Federal Forests (for non-commercial, personal consumption only). Of course, harvesting should only be done with permission on private lands if you are not the owner.

If you are really into mushrooms, you might think about joining The New York Mycological Society, [www.newyorkmc.org](http://www.newyorkmc.org), and/or one of the more local groups like the Rochester Area Mycological Association (RAMA) or the new Western New York Mycology Club. See the club’s Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/840973315970658/>.

Are you considering commercial harvesting of wild mushrooms or growing your own for personal use or sale? To find out more about the state law, certification businesses and related courses, visit: [www.smallfarms.cornell.org/projects/mushrooms/](http://www.smallfarms.cornell.org/projects/mushrooms/).

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Whether or not you are an aspiring or long-time mushroom forager, it's enriching to know more about these beautiful and ecologically beneficial organisms with their tremendous diversity of forms and fascinating life cycles.

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