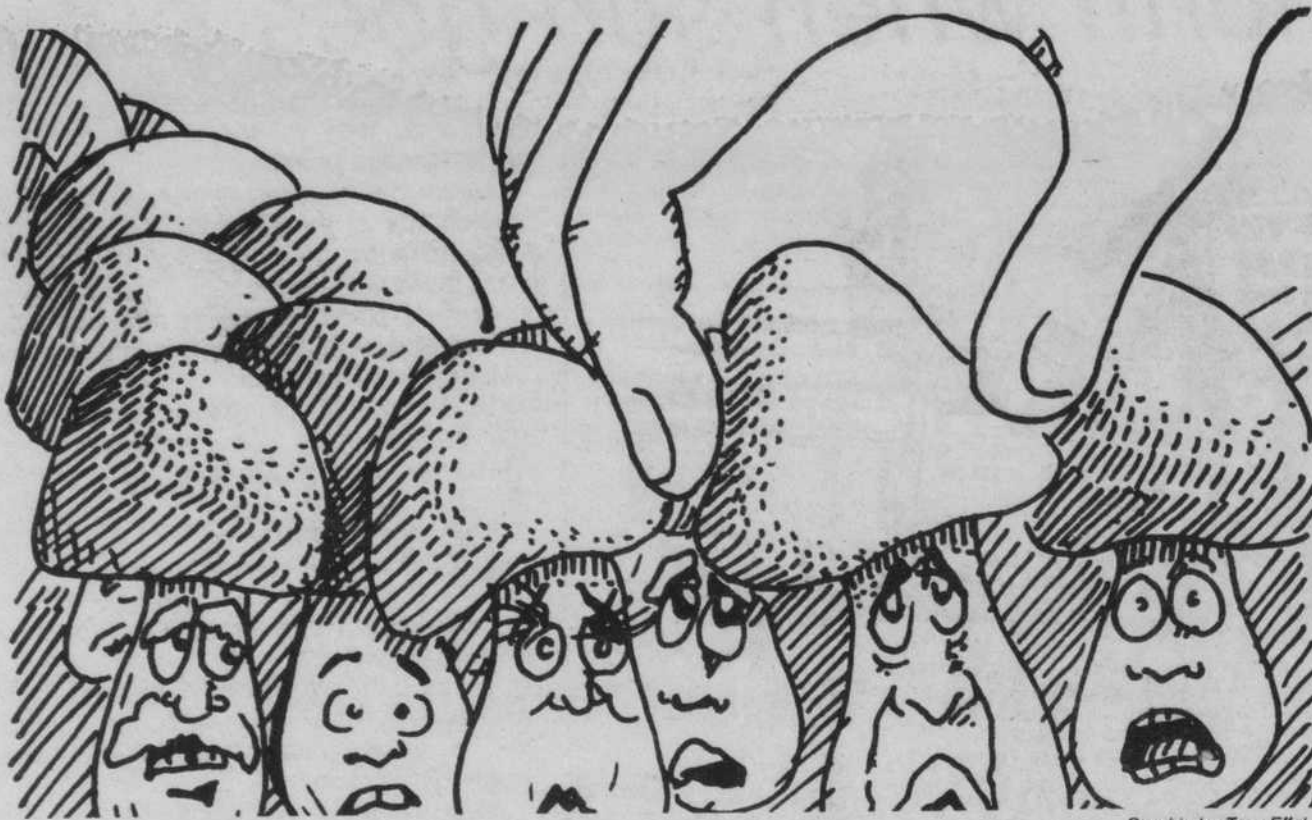




Graphic by Tom Effel

Mushrooms can get you turned on, turned in—or dead

By SHAUN BRINK
For the Emerald

Lying bellyflop in mud may be the most comfortable position you end up in if you go mushroom picking this fall.

You could find yourself looking up at a gavel-handed judge or looking into a toilet bowl — if you are a Magic-Mushroom picker.

Magic Mush is the street name for psychoactive fungi such as Psilocybe Semilanceata and Panaeolus Campanulatus. Complicated names, but users say it is an uncomplicated and cheap high.

The right combination of rain and sunshine brings out this curious breed of mushrooms and hunters who head for farmlands as far away as Newport to pick.

"You have to hit the fields before sunrise," advised one veteran hunter. "That way you get the best pickings and also avoid testy farmers."

"But watch out for cops," he added, "and don't be afraid to dive for cover in the cow flops."

There is an alternative to the cloak-and-dung method, however. The Lincoln County sheriff's department recommends hunters simply ask permission.

"The majority of owners probably wouldn't mind if the people would come and ask first if they could look for mushrooms in the field," said department spokesman Lt. Rolf Lengwenus.

Pickers who do not secure prior permission will be cited for trespassing, he said. The actual fine or jail sentence will be determined by the trial judge.

While mushroom pickers do face a trespassing citation, the legality of possession of psychedelic mushrooms is unclear. The Emerald contacted the Lane County district attorney's office and the state attorney general's office, but neither could provide any information on mushroom possession.

"A really good street dick is probably more up on (the drug laws) than our average lawyer," says Jim Sanderson of the attorney general's office.

But local law enforcement departments expressed the same confusion.

"The laws have just been completely revised," said Lengwenus. "It is still a gray area for us."

Oregon's undefined possession laws and its abundance of rain attracts more mushroom pickers every year, and the increase concerns medical authorities.

"Frankly, our advice is to stay away from all mushrooms," said Marsh Norton of the Oregon Poison Control Center.

Different species of mushrooms, she explained, can grow together in one clump, and a hunter could pick a lethal mushroom amongst a group of psychedelic fungi, she said.

Just last week, reports circulated of extremely toxic mushrooms spotted in the Alton Baker Park area. One of the most deadly in the world, it is known as the "Destroying Angel."

The "Angel" grows as large as 6 inches in diameter and 6 inches in height. It is greenish-yellow and has a collar around the stem.

If any questionable mushrooms are eaten, the center recommends immediate vomiting, even before the mushroom is identified.

"It takes longer to identify the mushroom than you have time," Norton said.

The center also recommends an uncooked sample of any mushroom eaten, whether it is for the dinner table or a Saturday night party, be kept refrigerated for possible later identification.

Symptoms of mushroom poisoning vary, Norton said. Milder forms result in diarrhea, cramps and vomiting. Mushrooms such as the Destroying Angel can cause death, she said.

If mushroom poisoning is suspected, additional advice can be obtained from the toll-free number, 1-800-452-7165. Eugene's Sacred Heart Hospital also has an emergency center equipped with a poison index system. Their emergency number is 686-6931.



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