The 10 Commandments of Eating Wild Mushrooms

Dr. Mike Amaranthus

Every time I go into the woods someone will holler at me, hold up a mushroom and yell **"is this edible?"**. My answer is always the same, **"yes….but it could kill you".** Seriously, collecting and eating wild mushrooms is not to be trifled with. I decided to write the **10 commandments of eating wild mushrooms** as a general guide to proper wild mushroom practices to keep people safe. I emphasized "the big three" of edible mushrooms, morels, chanterelles, king boletes and some dangerous lookalikes.

Morels, chanterelles, king boletes, other edible mushrooms and dangerous lookalikes are included in ***Fry, Thrive or Die*** **: a pocket guide to western mushrooms** and can be safely identified and distinguished from dangerous lookalikes using the book and a little field experience. Wild mushroom hunters can also use these "10 Commandments" before eating any wild mushroom to help protect themselves from accidental poisoning.

Dangerous lookalikes such as false morels (*Gyromitra* and *Helvella* spp.), the jack-o'-lantern false chanterelle (*Omphalotus olearius*), and the scaly chanterelle (*Turbinellus floccosus*) are poisonous. Satan's bolete (*Rubroboletus satanas*) gets its name for a good reason. The Red Pored Bolete (*Rubroboletus pulcherrimus*) is equally as poisonous. These species (and others) can cause serious illness or death and should be avoided. Some pictures below (Figures 2,3,4) will help you visualize the poisonous vs. edible species.

Fig 1. Eat your king boletes with confidence!

The 10 Commandments of Eating Wild Edible Mushrooms

1. **When in doubt, throw it out.**
   If you are unfamiliar with a species, check and recheck your identification with a mushroom guide book. If you are still uncertain, consult an expert or discard the mushroom.
2. **Examine every specimen.**
   Carefully inspect each mushroom you plan to eat. A different species can easily become mixed in with an otherwise edible collection.
3. **Avoid plastic bags.**
   Do not collect or store mushrooms in plastic bags, which can accelerate spoilage and encourage mold growth.
4. **Check the spore print.**
   A spore print can help confirm identification. Place a cap gill-side or pore-side down on paper, cover it with a glass or bowl, and leave it for an hour or more. The color of the spore print can provide valuable identification clues.
5. **Never eat wild mushrooms raw.**
   Always cook your mushrooms thoroughly. Raw morels can cause poisoning, and undercooked morels may cause digestive upset in some people.

6. **Eat only fresh, sound specimens.**
   Many poisoning incidents occur when edible mushrooms are eaten in poor condition. Avoid mushrooms that are old, moldy, waterlogged, or beginning to rot.
7. **Save an uncooked specimen.**
   Keep one uncooked example of each species you eat in the refrigerator. If illness occurs, this specimen can help experts identify the mushroom involved.
8. **Refrigerate your harvest.**
   Prompt refrigeration helps prevent mold growth and keeps mushrooms in good condition until they are used.
9. **Try new species cautiously.**
   If you are eating an edible species for the first time, consume only a small amount. Individuals can react differently to the same mushroom species.
10. **Respect fear and hesitation.**
    Never pressure anyone to eat wild mushrooms. If someone is uncomfortable or fearful about eating them, respect their decision. Anxiety alone can sometimes contribute to feelings of illness.

Following these guidelines will greatly reduce the risk of accidental poisoning and help ensure that wild mushroom foraging remains a safe and enjoyable activity.

Figure 2. Left to Right: Poisonous *Gyromitra sp* (False Morel), Poisonous *Helvella sp*.(Elfin Saddle)and Delicious *Morchella sp* (Morel)

Figure 3. Left to Right: Poisonous *Omphalotus sp* (Jack O Latern), Poisonous *Turbinellus sp*.(Scaley chanterelle)and Delicious *Cantharellus sp* (Chanterelle)

Figure 4. Left to Right: Poisonous Rubroboletus satanus (Satan's bolete), Poisonous *Rubroboletus purcherrimus* (Red-pored bolete)and Delicious *Boletus edulis* (King Bolete)