

room hunting is that you don't eat what you are not sure of. You must be aware that this can be dangerous. The first step is to identify, among the 100 edible mushrooms we have in Quebec, which are the very best mushrooms to eat. There are about 10 really good edibles that are easy to identify. So you should concentrate on picking those 10 types at first, and you should learn the characteristics of the 10 deadly poisonous mushrooms that you must avoid.

### **Are there many deaths by mushroom here in Quebec?**

There was one death last year and there was another five years ago. So the number of deaths by mushroom poisoning is rather small compared to deaths in snowmobile accidents, for example. The deadliest mushrooms are usually long-acting, so you have time to get to the hospital if you think you have eaten something poisonous.

### **Is there a special way to pick mushrooms?**

If you know the mushroom, then you can cut the stem wherever you want, but if you don't know the species, it's preferable to dig a bit around the stem and cut it quite low. This will help you identify the mushroom. On the poisonous amanita mushroom, there is a bulb under the soil at the base of the stem, which is a distinguishing feature. If you cut the stem high, you won't see that bulb. That's why it is better to dig a bit if you're not sure.

### **You mentioned something about cultivating mushrooms. How does that**

Pierre Noël's Mycoboutique is "like a general store" for mushroom enthusiasts and novices. The boutique sells species upon species, including portobello and oyster mushrooms (below). There are also medicinal varieties like reishi, which is used to treat "pretty much everything except for sexual potency." If romance is what you're after, the phallic matsutake variety may be more to your liking.

### **work?**

We sell kits to grow different kinds of mushrooms. We have one in our window you can see. That one is for indoors and is growing oyster mushrooms on straw. We also have plugs for outside, which you can put into a tree or a log.

### **Does it hurt the tree?**

The tree has to be dead. You just put the plugs into a freshly cut log to produce different types of mushrooms. We have about a dozen species of kits you can buy.

### **Are they guaranteed to grow mushrooms?**

There is no guarantee, because we are dealing with nature, but it usually works like clockwork. If you have the substrate (something for the mushroom to feed on, like straw or wood) and humidity, it should work.

### **How long do they last?**

It's all a question of the substrate. The straw will produce mushrooms for a month or two, but if you take a poplar log it will produce for maybe three years. An apple tree, which is a denser wood, will last for 10 years outside. Of course, you need to plug in indigenous mushroom varieties so they will survive the winter.

### **How much do they cost?**

About \$25 a kit.

### **What are the indigenous mushroom varieties we can grow here?**

We have oyster mushrooms, morels and maitake



mushrooms. We also have lion's mane, which is common here, and we have the chicken of the woods mushroom, which has the texture of fried chicken when it's cooked. We also have a kit to grow shiitake mushrooms. They're not indigenous to Quebec, but they can grow outside here because they survive cold temperatures easily. We also have reishi, which is a medicinal mushroom.

### **I've never heard of medicinal mushrooms.**

When we started the boutique here four years ago, I didn't know anything about medicinal mushrooms either. Our customers told us about them and now we sell reishi and chaga mushrooms in the store. Medicinal mushrooms have been taken for centuries in Asia and Russia, but they also grow here in Quebec.

### **What are they used to treat?**

Reishi is called the mushroom of eternal life in Chinese. It's an immune stimulant, it's anti-bacterial, anti-inflammatory and liver cleansing. It lowers blood pressure and balances the blood sugar levels. There was a recent study by the British Cancer Institute which dealt with the cancer-fighting properties of this mushroom. It's good for pretty much everything except for sexual potency.

### **Do you have mushrooms for that as well?**

We have matsutake mushrooms, which are very prized in Japan because they believe it increases sexual potency. When this mushroom is young, and the cap isn't open yet, it's very penis-like. The Japanese will pay \$1,000 a kilo for a young specimen of this mushroom. When the mushroom gets bigger and the cap

grows, they won't pay anything for them, even though they taste and smell better when they are more mature.

### **Do they grow here in Quebec?**

Yes, but the season is mostly August and September.

### **What are the best times for wild mushroom picking?**

The season starts in April with the morels. They start coming up when the soil defrosts, usually at the end of April to mid-May.

### **Which mushrooms come up after that?**

After the morels, it grows gradually. In mid-July you have the chanterelles. After that, the variety and the quantity of mushrooms will grow and grow, all the way until October. The best time to pick mushrooms is in September.

### **What sparked your interest in mushrooms?**

Mushrooms are amazing. They're probably one-fourth of the biomass of the world and they're right underneath our feet to pick. They're good to eat, they're good for our health, we can use them as fertilizer instead of chemicals, and we can even use them to transform table scraps.

### **Really? How?**

We use this mixture of yeast, which is a microscopic mushroom, anaerobic bacteria and cereal. This has been proven to be the fastest way to deal with table scraps. It does-

n't rot the food like composting; it ferments it. You can put bones, meat, whatever you want in the mix and just sprinkle some of the mixture on top. It has no odour, so you can keep it inside. It produces a liquid, which you can use to fertilize your plants, and after a while you get the hard part, which will be very small compared to what you put there. You can mix that with earth and it will decompose very fast. It's probably the future for composting.

### **That's amazing. How much does it cost?**

This bag for \$8 would last a family of five for one month.

### **There really is a lot to learn about mushrooms. How did you get started?**

I am a member of the Cercle des Mycologues de Montréal, which is one of the biggest and best mushroom societies in the world. They have regular excursions each weekend from April to October, and they have introductory courses and specialized courses which you can take. In the mycological societies, you have the two types of people: those who like to identify mushrooms and those who like to eat them. Usually people do one thing and not the other. I like cooking very much and I like going in the woods to identify mushrooms. With mushrooms, you can have both the knowledge and the pleasure of eating.