

WILD PLANTS AS FOOD.

BY F. W. WAUGH.

A subject regarding which rather little is known, and which would well repay investigation, is the edibility of the various weeds, plants and other vegetable materials which grow in a wild or uncultivated condition in fields, woods, and waste places generally. The writer's attention was directed to this originally by a study of the food plants used by Indian tribes, though a portion of the information has been obtained from other sources.

The more extended use of our natural food resources could be made to supplement garden production in such a way as to leave a greater acreage for staple products, a special advantage under present conditions.

A knowledge of our native vegetable foods will no doubt also be of interest to campers and those taking extended trips through unsettled parts of the country.

MUSHROOMS.

The mushrooms have attracted more attention, possibly, than other vegetable foods, and an increasing number of people are becoming interested in them scientifically, as well as in their collection for use.

The wide distribution of our edible fungi gives them an important place in the list of cheap and easily-obtained foods. Most of them are easy to identify and the search for new or additional species provides a constant source of interest.

A spore-print should always be taken if any doubt exists as to the identity of a gill-bearing fungus. A piece of white paper is brushed over with a not very strong solution of gum arabic and allowed to dry. The stem of the mushroom is sliced off carefully close to the cap, and the latter is laid on the paper, gills downward, then covered with a bell-jar or drinking-glass and left for a few hours. The spores adhere to the paper in radiating lines and afford a means of deciding their color, which is of importance in identifying them.

Last year the writer collected and made use of over a dozen species of mushrooms, the majority collected within city limits. These were frequently obtained on the way to work; though now and then a bicycle jaunt in the early morning or at the week-end assisted in rounding out the supply.

Damp weather or frequent showers are a practical necessity for mushroom growth. Consequently, if the season is unusually dry, very few of the fungi will be found. In favorable seasons, however, they last right along into frosty weather.

A shady corner in a backyard provided a liberal supply of puffballs (*Lycoperdon pyriforme*) for two or three weeks.

A very common city mushroom is the *Coprinus comatus*, or shaggy mane. This, as well as the closely related species, the Common Inkcap, *Coprinus atramentarius*, was found growing around parks, lawns, roadsides, factory sites, and dumping-grounds for street sweepings. Morels also grow among park shrubbery, as well as in the woods among the ferns and evergreens. The Smooth Lepiota, *Lepiota naucina*, is another which is found quite frequently in shady places. This is of about the same height and general appearance as the common mushroom, although the gills are white in young specimens, becoming slightly pink when older. Care should be taken to differentiate this from the poisonous Amanitas.

Another, but not very common species, at least locally, was the Early Pholiota, *Pholiota praecox*. Enough for half a dozen meals of these was found from time to time under some snowball and lilac shrubs in a neglected dooryard.

Other species found in suburban localities were: Oyster Fungus, *Pleurotus ostreatus*; Fairy-ring Mushroom, *Marasmius oreades*, and Glistening Inkcap, *Coprinus micaceus*. The *Agaricus campestris*, or common mushroom, was also found occasionally, but not so plentifully as some of the others mentioned.

A friend, to whom the writer had mentioned the edibility of the giant puffball, *Lycoperdon giganteum*, one day brought in one of these about seven inches in diameter. The fungus was white and in prime condition for eating and was quite large enough for seven or eight persons. A reliable method of cooking is to slice and fry in butter. Unfortunately, this fungus is rather uncommon.

The fungi mentioned are merely a few of those likely to be found locally, but will afford the beginner an idea of the possibilities.

GREENS.

Another, and even more prolific class than the mushrooms, consists of those vegetables which are prepared like asparagus or spinach. The Indian tribes of America were evidently well-versed in these and are capable of affording us valuable suggestions. A very good list for the Iroquois, an eastern woodland tribe, appeared recently in Memoir 86 of the Geological Survey of Canada. This includes some sixteen or more vegetables used