

# Mountain Views News

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BEST FRIENDS & MORE

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## Christopher Nyerges

Christopher Nyerges is the author of "Foraging California" (which has a section on mushrooms), "Guide to Wild Foods and Useful Plants," "How to Survive Anywhere," and other books. He has studied mycology, and led wilderness trips, since 1974. He can be reached at the School of Self-Reliance, Box 41834, Eagle Rock, CA 90041, or [www.SchoolofSelf-Reliance.com](http://www.SchoolofSelf-Reliance.com).

## EXPLORING THE WORLD OF FUNGI

### INTRODUCTION TO MUSHROOMS

My serious pursuit of the natural world began before I entered high school. Of all the natural sciences, I found mycology the most fascinating and mysterious. There were scant few experts that I could consult with.

Furthermore, you couldn't just go out and study a specific mushroom any day you wish, as you might with, say, an oak tree. Mushrooms occur when conditions are right, in a somewhat unpredictable manner, and then they quickly decompose.

So, in the early 1970s, I joined the L.A. Mycological Association to actively pursue my education of the mysterious world of fungi directly with experts, rather than books. I learned how to identify wild mushrooms in the field, and I learned how to cook the edible ones. I had some great mentors from the organization.

I was interested in mushrooms from the standpoint of food, though it was always impressed up-on me to never eat any wild mushroom until I've taken the time to absolutely identify it. I had the opportunity to participate in the field to learn about the details of mushroom identification. Through our monthly meetings with LAMA, I was given insight into the taxonomy of mushrooms, and many of the fine details for keying out a mushroom to genus, and ideally to species. Fortunately, today, we have the internet which can dramatically speed up your learning process.



Helen Wong with Reishi mushroom she grew

### GETTING STARTED

If you are a complete beginner, I would suggest seeking out a group local to you where you can get some field experience. You could inquire also through the North American Mycological Association to find a group local to your area, at <https://namyco.org/>.

You can also search for field trips through local colleges and universities, through native plant organizations, and through general internet searches. There are many sources on-line for mushroom identification. My favorite is MushroomExpert.com run by Michael Kuo.

Locally, you should attend the annual LAMA event on Sunday, February 11, 2024 at the L.A. County Arboretum from 9am to 4pm. This is an excellent way to see recently collected mushrooms and listen to lectures from experts.

## CLASSIFICATION

The basic categories will be gilled and non-gilled fungi. The gilled fungi are further delineated by their spore color. Spores are analogous to seeds, and they fall from the gills onto the ground, and there are simple ways to determine spore color. There are some excellent pictorial guides for keying out the non-gilled fungi, such as David Arora's "*All That the Rain Promises and More.*"

Then, to key a mushroom to genus and species, you need to take note of all the specific details and you probably need to learn some new terms along the way. The details you need to know include (but are not limited to) the shape and texture of the cap, the way the gills meet the stem, the thickness or thinness of the stem, and where it is growing.

For non-gilled mushrooms, you will first deal with mushrooms that have pores (small tubes where the spores are formed) instead of gills. Non-gilled fungi are initially easy to determine genus. If it is not pored, you look at the overall shape. Is it like a ball, like coral, a sponge, etc.

## FOOLPROOF FOUR

A good beginning to the study of mycology is the "foolproof four," a term coined by Clyde Christensen in his "*Common Edible Mushrooms*" book. These are four edible mushrooms that are widespread, and easily identified.

These are morels (*Morchella* spp), Puffballs, Inky caps, and Chicken of the woods. These are not the only "easy" mushrooms to identify, but if you are a beginner, start there. Then learn the other common mushrooms in your area. There are many common wild mushrooms that are found nation-wide such as oyster mushrooms, chanterelles, and field mushrooms (*Agaricus campestris*).

## CAVEAT

Mycology is a Science, and it requires a substantial amount of study and field work to be able to collect wild mushrooms and eat them without getting sick or dying. And in March of 2009, life-long mushroom hunter Angelo Crippa collected some mushrooms in the hills above Santa Barbara, California. He sautéed them, and ate them, and told his wife they were delicious. Unfortunately, rather than an edible species, he collected a close-lookalike, *Amanita ocreata*, which is deadly. Even with hospital treatment, he survived only 7 days in what became a painful death.

### **Classes and Books by Christopher Nyerges**

Self-Reliance – Survival – Sustainability

[www.SchoolofSelf-Reliance.com](http://www.SchoolofSelf-Reliance.com)

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