

Preface

The past few decades have witnessed a dramatic increase in the diversity of mushrooms gracing the tables of our restaurants and the shelves of our supermarkets. While the increased consumption has consisted primarily of cultivated varieties of Asian origin, there has also been an upsurge of interest in mushrooms that can be obtained only from the wild.

A concern over a lack of knowledge in Australasia, the often prevailing opinion that "if it's natural it must be edible," and some significant incidents of mushroom poisonings prompted the development and ultimate publication of a book on the subject in New Zealand in 1998. The book, written by Ian Hall, Peter Buchanan, Wang Yun, and Tony Cole, covered the most important edible and poisonous mushrooms that Australians and New Zealanders might encounter in the wild, as well as the edible mushrooms that could be purchased in supermarkets. The original authors were joined by Steve Stephenson, a mycologist from the United States, and their combined efforts produced this new book. Whereas the first book mentioned or illustrated about 205 taxa, this book treats about 280 taxa, and many taxa only mentioned or illustrated in the first book are now discussed. The resulting reference is truly international in its coverage and will appeal to enthusiasts from around the world.

Edible and Poisonous Mushrooms of the World is aimed at individuals who are interested in mushrooms and wish to expand their knowledge about the subject, including information on the roles of fungi in nature and how they can be grown and cultivated. The introduction provides essential background information about what mushrooms are, both poisonous and edible, how they are named, and how they fit into the big picture, both as part of the natural world and as part of the world market. The first section, *Cultivating Mushrooms*, divides its attention between nonmycorrhizal mushrooms, including the eight most popular saprobic mushrooms, and mycorrhizal mushrooms, with an emphasis on the Périgord black truffle. The second section, *Collecting Wild Mushrooms*, discusses the identification and collection of mushrooms and the rules that should be followed when picking them. It also includes a helpful list of the major poisoning syndromes and the mushrooms known to be associated with each one. The final section, *A List of Wild Mushrooms*, is the cornerstone of the book, providing details of size, colour, habit, and other identifying factors for the world's most common edible wild mushrooms (including those with major international markets), for poisonous species that should be avoided at all costs, and for mushroom curiosities likely to be encountered in nature.

Many hundreds of species of questionable or unknown edibility have been omitted, as have a large number of lesser edible mushrooms that may be important in one country but not in others. For information on these species it would be wise to consult mushroom field guides in the relevant country.

A vast amount of information on mushrooms can be found on various Web sites, a few of which are listed in *Mushroom Cultivation with Special Emphasis on Appropriate Techniques for Developing Countries* (Oei 1996) and related articles in the *Mycologist* magazine. Simply typing the word "mushroom" into a general search engine will bring up tens of thousands of references. A more useful and orderly search can be obtained by accessing Cornell University's WWW Virtual Library of Mycology. While a good proportion of the information available from the Web is of high quality, much of it is also ephemeral, and this creates major problems for those using it. Web addresses also have a tendency to change when those who created the Web page change employment or move to another server. Consequently, the list of Web addresses at the back of the book includes only those sites expected to be reasonably permanent, such as those run by universities or other major institutions.

At the back of the book *Chinese Names of Mushrooms* links Chinese script and pinyin common names to their scientific and common European equivalents.