

The East London Garden Society

Plant Facts

Mushrooms



Mushrooms are neither plant nor animal; they are fungi and have been valued for their medicinal properties for centuries. In ancient Egypt, mushrooms were thought to bring long life. Today in the 21st Century, research is bearing out the mechanisms behind the mushroom's health-boosting properties, including their potential to fight one of the greatest plagues to modern man, cancer.

Most of the knowledge about mushrooms arrives from ancient Chinese medicine where mushrooms are regarded as tonics. Mushrooms are nature's recycling system. If it weren't for mushrooms, we wouldn't have plants because mushrooms break down rocks and organic matter turning them into soil. Mushrooms are actually only the fruiting body of a vaster fungal form, the mycelium.

The mycelium is a fascinating cobweb-like mat that infuses nearly all landscapes. It is through the mycelium that the fungus absorbs nutrients from the environment. When two compatible mycelia combine, the resulting mycelium occasionally forms fruiting bodies called mushrooms.

The mushrooms make spores which fly away to make new mycelia colonies and the lifecycle is complete. In some ways, mycelia are "sentient" and seem to demonstrate learning. If one pathway is broken, it develops an alternate path. The mycelia also contain many of the healing agents for which mushrooms are revered. Some supplements offer the added boon of including the mycelia of the mushroom for its added health benefits, including potentially enhancing energy production and focus.

They're an excellent addition to any meal but if you forage you must be sure of what you are picking; it's easy to get them confused. Growing your own is a far safer alternative. In general, mushroom fruit bodies are better to eat cooked but consuming the mushrooms raw or using a whole food mushroom product is generally a better alternative if you're reasonably healthy and looking to maintain optimal health.

They assist in maintaining ideal functioning of your various systems. If you choose to eat your mushrooms raw, make sure they are organically grown as their flesh easily absorbs air and soil contaminants.

Likewise, you'll want to make sure any product you buy is certified organic for the same reason. In addition to valuable nutrients, whole mushrooms also provide healthful dietary fibre that acts as pre-biotic platforms for the growth of pro-biotic organisms in your gut, which is very important for digestive health.