



## Magic mushrooms (*Psilocybe*) and poisonous lookalikes

The small, almost insignificant species of *Psilocybe* grow in grasslands or on rotting wood, dung or compost where there is plenty of organic matter. They are well recognized by a section of society not because of their food value, which must be trivial, but because of the hallucinogenic LSD-like effects produced by eating the mushrooms. These are caused by the tryptamine derivatives psilocybin and psilocin. The symptoms of poisoning begin 15 minutes to 2 hours after eating and last for up to five hours. Sedatives are sometimes used when a person becomes over excited. Some users become violent to themselves or others, or become anxious or depressed.

Poisoning through eating mushrooms that are similar in appearance to *Psilocybe* are not uncommon. The haymaker's mushroom (*Panaeolina foenicicii*) and *Galerina* spp. are just two of the many little brown mushrooms (lbms) that have been mistaken for *Psilocybe*. Some species of *Galerina* contain dangerous quantities of amatoxins. The haymaker's mushroom may contain hallucinagens. Identification of lbms usually requires a high powered microscope.



## Yellow stainer (*Agaricus xanthoderma* and *Agaricus pilatianus*)

The mushrooms of the yellow stainer have relatively large caps up to 15 cm in diameter, with prominent rings on the stalks. The gills are white when young, becoming brownish with age. Consequently, they superficially resemble the common field mushroom (*Agaricus campestris*). However, both species are poisonous and should not be eaten. *Agaricus xanthoderma* can be easily distinguished because it stains bright yellow when bruised or cut but *Agaricus pilatianus* only stains yellow when it is young.



## *Clitocybe* spp.

There are many species of *Clitocybe* most of which are white, off white, light brown or shades of pastel yellow, green, cream or pink. At maturity the caps become funnel-shaped and the gills run down the stem. There is no ring on the stem. They can be found in pastures, woodlands and forests. A few species are edible but *Clitocybe dealbata* and *Clitocybe rivolusa* contain concentrations of muscarine sufficient to kill. Consumption of the Japanese mushroom *Clitocybe acromelalgia* and the European *Clitocybe amoenolens* can produce erythromelalgia, a neurovascular peripheral nerve disorder, that can last from a few days to several months.



**IMPORTANT, READ ME** It is easy to confuse some edible and poisonous mushrooms so be absolutely sure of a mushroom's identity before eating. If you are in any doubt, throw it out. Some people can have adverse reactions to even edible mushrooms so eat just a small amount of a new mushroom the first time you try it. Keep a few of the mushrooms in your fridge just in case you need to consult a doctor later. Always store mushrooms in paper bags, never in plastic bags and keep them cool after picking. Cook mushrooms before eating - only a few are safe to eat raw. Wash your hands after touching poisonous mushrooms. Do not put poisonous mushrooms in the same bag as those gathered for the table.

<sup>2</sup> NATIONAL POISONS CENTRE 24 hour poison advice 0800-764 766.

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