

Ethnomycology: Inventory of the edible mushrooms in Darma valley, District Pithoragarh

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The history of the use of wild mushrooms as food and in medicine is well documented for many countries, and India is just one example. A large number of mushroom species are not only edible and nutritious but also possess tonic and medicinal qualities. In Uttarakhand, villagers tend to be either mycophilic (term applied to those ethnic groups in which wild mushroom are regarded as suitable food) and mycophobic (term applied to those ethnic groups that have only a minor regard for mushrooms and often have a fear of them). However, in the Darma valley of Uttarakhand, there is not distinct cultures, which displays these exact phenomena, and both attitudes are present in the villages, sometimes even in the same family.



Even though, lack of knowledge or expertise in distinguishing between an edible and non-edible (poisonous) results very often in detrimental effect/s, locals even then take recourse to harvesting the same for food, with no ill effects. Till date, the scientific community has failed to distinguish between an edible and non-edible species, and thus recourse to local harvesters, their knowledge or experience gained over the decades as relates to precise distinguishing characteristics between an edible and non-edible species, their habitat specificity as well as of close association with a particular tree species, remains important to be inventoried.

In the present case study aimed to document the wild edible mushrooms and associated ethnomycological knowledge of the local people in Darma valley in Pithoragarh district of Uttarakhand.

A total of 12 wild edible mushrooms were reported and most of them are collected in the rainy season. The local people in the study identify the wild edible mushrooms through their ethnomycological knowledge. Each mushroom species has a vernacular name. The vernacular names of the mushrooms reflect upon the following characteristics- (i) colour of the fruiting body in general or of the spores in particular, (ii) habit- structure, shape (resemblance with), (iii) habitat preference, (iv) association of the species with the particular tree species (v) and other features, viz., secretion of latex. The collection of wild edible mushrooms not only play a significant role in the dietary systems of the local people, but also give economic benefits to some extents to few households.