

ENCHANTED LIVING

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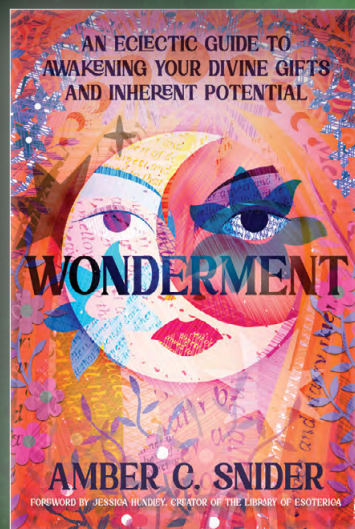
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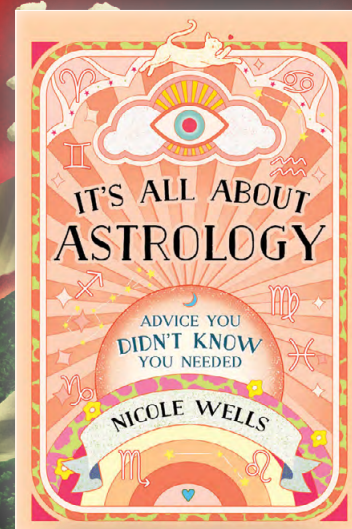
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A Fairy Ring (1870–80), by Walter Jenks Morgan

It was intern Brenna Mills who first suggested we do a mushroom issue, and I thought that seemed like a lovely idea. We certainly feature an abundance of mushrooms in this magazine, given that they're undeniably enchanted things—the fruiting bodies of a fungus, to be exact—and when *don't* you see an enchanted forest or a fairy scene in which a mushroom is making its presence felt? They pretty much come with the territory. Look at nearly any piece of Victorian fairy art—and we admit that we look at more than our fair share—and you'll likely spy a delicate fae creature perched, splayed, wearing, or balancing on some manner of shroom, if not sheltering beneath one.

But really, we had no idea how easy it would be to fill an entire issue with mushrooms. Much as we love them, we ended up having to leave so much out: Sleek *Matrix*-style mushroom leather fashions, mycelium-based architectural design, a whole sector of the travel industry devoted to fungal adventures and delights. We read about designers growing shoes from mycelium that might have suited an alternative, more eco-conscious Cinderella. We became fans of rock-star mycologists and impassioned foragers and world-renowned chefs besotted by the deliciously rich umami of the shiitake, the tender texture of the black trumpet, the buried mystery and insane delights of the black truffle. We could have produced a giant and undoubtedly sumptuous tome on the subject, and I'm not going to lie—we were tempted.

And how were we to know that these nubbins of mysterious, almost primeval life are also models of interspecies cooperation—and that they might save the world? We had no idea they were so cutting edge ... not to mention so chatty! There was a lot we didn't know about the secret life of mushrooms, but it looks like we're not the only ones to have been seduced into a tryst with the fungal kingdom, and we won't be the last.

So we've done our best here in this special issue to capture some of that kingdom's enchantment in at least some of its strange, dizzying, wonderful, and mind-exploding variety. We hope you enjoy our humble homage to the un-humble mushroom, and that the magazine in your hands might even serve as a call to adventure, leading you to far-flung forests or patches of moss or maybe your own backyard—wherever our favorite fruiting bodies beckon.

Love,

Carolyn Turgeon



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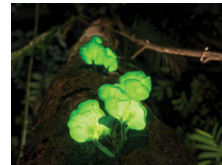
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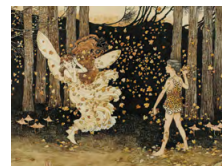
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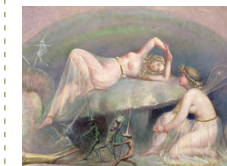
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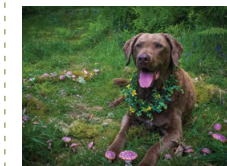
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Enchanted Living's Mushroom Issue



Heather Brooks

Heather Brooks is an Asheville-based nature artist who creates intricate collages using found organic materials, which she shares online under the moniker Small Woodland Things. Her work blends creativity with scientific exploration, allowing her to deepen her understanding of the diverse species and ecosystems of the Southern Appalachian Mountains she calls home. She also leads free community walks during the summer and teaches workshops at Warren Wilson College on mushroom foraging as well as on sculpting with driftwood and succulents. When not roaming through the wood, Brooks can be found mountain biking, road-tripping, or whipping up her daily mushroom haul.



Aimée Cornwell

Aimée Cornwell is an English artist living in rural Wales on a small holding where she's nurturing a forest garden, helped by a team of goats who manage the scrub and put the nutrients back into the soil. She paints and tattoos locally, inspired most by British folklore, goddesses, native animals and plants, and her own inner world. For this issue she contributed an astonishing capture of wild amanitas growing in a secret spot in the forest near her home; sadly, the farmers harvested the trees for timber the following spring. The mycelia, however, were not deterred and simply moved along under the mossy surface, fruiting in another epic yet fleeting display the following year.



Cynthia Gralla

Cynthia Gralla's books are *The Floating World* and *The Demimonde in Japanese Literature*. She's written for *Ploughshares*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Mississippi Review*, *Electric Literature*, and other publications, and she produces the podcast, *A Real Affliction: BPD, Culture, and Stigma*. Raised in Florida, she now teaches literature and writing at Royal Roads University on Vancouver Island. She agrees with Anna Tsing, author of *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, that mushrooms are apt metaphors for writing: "Below the forest floor, fungal bodies extend themselves in nets and skeins, binding roots and mineral soils, long before producing mushrooms. All books emerge from similarly hidden collaborations."



Leigh Ann Henion

Leigh Ann Henion is the *New York Times*-best-selling author of *Night Magic: Adventures Among Glowworms, Moon Gardens, and Other Marvels of the Dark* and *Phenomenal: A Hesitant Adventurer's Search for Wonder in the Natural World*. Her writing has appeared in *Smithsonian*, the *Washington Post*, *National Geographic* and a variety of other publications. Henion lives in Southern Appalachia, where the biodiversity of fungi—including foxfire—abounds. One of her favorite fungi facts is that there are bioluminescent fungal networks glowing underground around the world, sometimes in thousand-acre patches. "I love knowing that we're surrounded by living mysteries," she says.



Lauren May

Lauren May is the creator of Must Love Herbs, an online resource for recipes, Appalachian folkways, gardening tips, and fun DIYs. Her family's roots in the Central Appalachian Region run well over 200 years deep. She connects daily with native plants and fungi as well as cultivars in her tea garden, vegetable garden, and the woods that surround her home. May is an animal lover and has five beloved dogs. She's been married for seventeen years to her high school sweetheart, who, surprisingly enough, doesn't eat sweets. She was a fifth-generation teacher until recently retiring to do Must Love Herbs full time. If you visit her online, you'll quickly note her deep love of mushrooms and flowers.



Jovana Rikalo

Photographer Jovana Rikalo created this issue's cover, her second for *Enchanted Living*. The first was for our 2021 Abundance issue, in which she captured from above a model lying on the grass surrounded by autumn leaves arranged to form a ball gown around her. For this issue, she wanted to "awaken nature and make greens shine through light and the spring season." She loves creating worlds that feel unreal but have realistic elements. To that end, she had "giant mushroom trees" sculpted to populate the lush, mossy park near her home in Novi Sad, Serbia. "I wanted to show the model existing in the forest with the mushroom trees," she says, "hugging them and living like a real fairy."



À la Mode in Mushrooms

BY SUSANN COKAL

A ring of pale mushrooms sprang up with the morning dew, and tonight you're going to fly and whirl in a mad fairy dance. What if you want to honor the occasion but don't have time for a full wardrobe refresh? You could turn up in a filmy gown made from flower petals and fervent wishes, as usual, or make a statement by doubling down on fungal fashion. You can collect some fantastic accents and accessories on your way to the fling.

- The mushroom hat is a fae wardrobe staple, whether it's a warm brown-gray or a flashier amanita red with white flecks. And you don't have to stop at one shroom—try piling them on top of each other till one big cap is covered in dozens of tiny ones, or wear them in bands and swirls for crowns and tiaras, like the forest lovers in our "Mushroom Maidens" feature on page 83.
- For highlights to cheeks, eyes, or any feature you want to render especially fetching, rub the desired areas with a sample from your favorite bioluminescent species. We recommend *Mycena pura*, Britain and Ireland's lilac bonnet, for gentle purple shades. North America's multi-lobed bitter oyster, *Panellus stipticus*, is a classic for the green tones Titania favors. It's one of the brightest of the approximately 70 to 125 species of glowing mushrooms on the planet.
- Bitter oysters and their kin also make bewitching jewels for eyebrows, fingers, and wrists. The fungi themselves are able to control the amount of light they shed using enzymes that react to oxygen.
- Your favorite skirt might already imitate a mushroom cap, with a smooth outer layer supported by a full understructure of ruffy gills. Why not experiment by adding plenty of petticoats and frilly bracket fungi (trending now: turkey tails and oysters)—some of which come in fantastic bright colors?
- Someday even the fabric a human designer uses might be made of fungus. Scientists have discovered a way to spin the chitin and chitosan in some species' cell walls into weavable threads.
- It's a great time to play with textures. Nothing looks more chic than a morel's brainy whorl set as an accent at wrists and neck, and many other species make their own fungi fur. Try a shaggy ink cap (*Coprinus comatus*): As it matures, the "fur" on top gets longer and lusher, with smoky lowlights around the base of the white shag. You'll need to dry it out well before use, but do save the ink to pour where you want your next colony to grow, because it carries the mushroom spores. *And* the *Coprinus* absorbs heavy metals from the soil, so it's an extra-eco-friendly resource.
- If you misplace your hat on a bright day, pluck a wide-capped mushroom to make your own shade. We like *Macrolepiota procera*, appropriately known as the parasol. It starts out ethereally delicate, then matures into a big, robust fruiting body with a shaggy-barked top.
- When you're all zhuzhed up and in the fairy ring at last, you'll find the mushrooms around the edge also make natural seating for fairy confabs. Their cushiony flesh conforms to *your* flesh for a good rest after a wild dance or a long spin around the circle.
- You might even want to drape yourself and your mushroom finery over one of them for your own communion rite. Turn your face to the sky and drink in the moonlight while your friends twirl the night away. You and your finery will be gone in the morning.

Art: *Mother Mushroom With Her Children* (c. 1900), by Edward Okun. Image courtesy Art Renewal Center.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOVANA RIKALO

OUR COVER STORY

THE MUSHROOM FAIRY

From the North American Journal of Fairyology

BY THEODORA GOSS

Our Cover Story

Theodora Goss

Readers of this journal are certainly familiar with the various flower fairies of Great Britain and Ireland, which have been written about extensively in academic journals as well as children’s books. More recently, fairyologists have focused on the flower fairies of the North American continent, such as the Lupine Fairy, the Bee Balm Fairy, and the Joe-Pye Weed Fairy. Although less popular with the public, our native tree and shrub fairies, such as the Dogwood, Redbud, and Buttonbush Fairies, have also been subjects of scholarly attention. However, almost no attention has been paid to what may be the most interesting and elusive fairies of all—the mushroom variety.

Noticing this lacuna, the editor of this journal, Professor Ebenezer Brown, graciously invited me to write about mushroom fairies for my fellow fairyologists. It has been my pleasure to study the Mushroom Fairy (*Fata fungi*) for the past decade, ever since I completed a Ph.D. in Fairy Studies at Harrington-Hall University in Massachusetts.

At first, my advisor tried to dissuade me from studying mushroom fairies, telling me the topic was simply too obscure. “Why don’t you choose one of the tree fairies that are still under-researched, such as the Spruce or Sycamore Fairy?” he asked me. He even urged me to consider the nascent field of moss fairies.

“But all of these fairies are already the subjects of established scholarly research,” I told him. I wanted to study something no one had studied before. And ever since I was a child, foraging in the forests of western Massachusetts with my grandmother, I have loved mushrooms, from the common turkey tail (*Trametes versicolor*) that grows along rotting logs to the resplendent and deadly fly agaric (*Amanita muscaria*), its crimson cap spotted with small white dots like a sign clearly indicating “Do not touch!”

Seeing that he could not dissuade me, Professor Brown reluctantly agreed to supervise my dissertation, *The Varieties of North American Mushroom Fairies*, which will soon be published as a scholarly monograph available from Harrington-Hall University Press. What follows is an excerpt from the introduction.

There are many different kinds of mushrooms all over the world, and therefore many different kinds of mushroom fairies. The term *mushroom fairy* can be used for the entire family, including for the fairies of toadstools, which are simply poisonous mushrooms. However, it is more accurate to call these fairies by their specific names, such as the Inkcap Fairy or the Common Puffball Fairy. Of course, fairyologists prefer to use the even more specific Latin genus and species designations, so the Hen of the Woods Fairy (also called the Maitake Fairy) is *Fata Grifola frondosa*.

In North America alone, there are so many mushroom varieties that it would take a lifetime to study them all, and wherever you find mushrooms, from the California hills to the

forests of Maine and the Louisiana bayous, you will find their fairies. Just like the flower and tree fairies you are probably familiar with in your own garden, the mushroom fairies guard and care for their mushrooms in various ways. For example, the Morel Fairies wash out the distinctive honeycomb-shaped sacks of the morels with rainwater and tend to any injuries caused by weather or depredation. They protect their mushrooms from the beetles that seem to love them so, although they cannot do much against the deer and grouse that are equally fans of the delicious morels. When I tell you that there are more than fifty different species of *Morchella*, the true morels, you can imagine how many different kinds of fairies must tend to this one genus of mushroom alone.

The fairies of poisonous mushrooms are even more proactive, and if you are out sketching or photographing mushrooms, you must watch out for their darts or arrows. Although these are small, approximately the size of an acacia thorn, they can be quite dangerous, and if you are stung by them, I recommend an immediate visit to your local poison control center.

Naturally, mushroom fairies have evolved to resemble the fungi they live among, so the Black Trumpet Fairies blend right in to the dark patches of those mushrooms on the forest floor, and the Saffron Milk Cap Fairies stand out as brilliantly orange, unless they are in a group of their mushrooms, in which case they are almost indistinguishable. While flower fairies’ clothing is generally made of petals, and tree fairies’ clothing is sewn from leaves or soft bark, mushroom fairies make themselves outfits using their mushrooms. Their garments can look like anything from the white frills of the shaggy mane, which resemble the fringe of a 1920s flapper, to the wrinkled brown leather of wood ear or the purple velvet of the violet wellcap.

Mushroom fairies also seem to take their personalities from their mushrooms. For example, the Chicken of the Woods Fairies are outgoing and gregarious, while the Chanterelle Fairies are opinionated and as peppery as their mushrooms are reputed to taste. The Hedgehog Mushroom Fairies are earthy and practical, rather like hobbits. The Porcini Fairies are brave, even heroic, in defense of their mushrooms. The Yellow Blusher Fairies are so shy that you will rarely see them. I have seen them only once, and they do indeed blush as yellow as their mushrooms. The Old Man of the Woods Fairies in fact resemble wrinkled grandfathers, while the Pettycoat Mottlegill Fairies look and sound exactly like little girls in pinafores.

Once again I should warn you about the more dangerous varieties of mushrooms, whose fairies are equally so. You must watch out in particular for the death cap, whose fairies look so friendly and unassuming—they will smile at you as they shoot poisonous darts into your hand. The Destroying Angel Fairies are easily spotted by their distinctive white robes and wings, which however are purely decorative. (Unlike flower and tree fairies, mushroom fairies do not have wings or fly, which may be



connected to the mushroom’s method of reproduction by spores rather than pollen.) You will know the Funeral Bell Fairies by the tolling of the bells they carry. I have already mentioned the fly agaric, whose fairies are easy to identify by their attractive red dresses with white polka dots.

There is still much we do not know about mushroom fairies. They can be male, female, or neither, depending on the type of mushroom. Regardless of their appearance, they seem to reproduce along with their mushrooms, so if you grow mushrooms, you are guaranteed to have mushroom fairies as well. Thoughtful fungus farmers (who grow mushrooms, yeasts, and molds) will provide water and shelter for the fairies that guard their mushrooms, knowing that the mushrooms will be healthier with fairies to care for them. However, if you wish to retain fairies for your mushrooms, you must use organic methods, because fairies will not stand for insecticides of any kind and will leave your farm directly if you use them.

If you wish to communicate with a mushroom fairy, I suggest you find one of the more sociable mushroom species, such as honey or oyster mushrooms, or even puffballs, although their fairies can be unpredictable. If you approach the fairies of whichever mushroom species you have chosen very politely, they may sit beside their mushrooms and have a conversation with you. I myself have been fortunate to gain the friendship of a Greenspot Milkcap Fairy who has told me a great deal about the secret life of the forest, to which humans are not usually privy. But the mushroom fairies see it all: the slow growth of trees over many seasons; the spring birth, summer blossoming, and autumn decay of flowers; the brief, vivid sojourn of foxes and owls and chipmunks. She has also told me about the lives of the mushrooms. Did you know there is much more of a mushroom under the ground than above? And did you know that through an underground network, mushrooms communicate with trees and enable them to communicate with one another? My Greenspot Milkcap Fairy has shown me how everything we see in the forest is connected, like a great web. We have sat together for hours on a mossy bank, me in my jeans and flannel shirt, she in a rippling green robe resembling the green cap of her mushroom, listening to the sounds of the forest around us. Sitting there, it seemed to me that I learned the great secret of the forest, which is patience.

There is still so much work to be done in the field of mushroom fairy scholarship. I urge my fellow fairyologists to study these important fungal spirits. Without them, how would the mushrooms grow? And without the mushrooms, how would the forests and our other natural ecosystems thrive? Graduate students in particular should focus on the fairies of lesser known mushrooms such as the shaggy rose goblet, which looks like a scarlet cup; the dog’s nose mushroom, which looks exactly how it sounds; the sulfurous staghorn jelly; the milky, globular shooting star; or the fluted bird’s nest, which seems to contain small white eggs. There are so many mushrooms and their fairies still to study! By searching for these species in the forests and fields and deserts where they are found, researchers will add important scholarship to the field of fairyology and teach us more about the fascinating Mushroom Fairy.



Theodora Goss is the World Fantasy, Locus, and Mythopoeic Award-winning author or editor of eleven books, including the short-story and poetry collections The Collected Enchantments and Snow White Learns Witchcraft, as well as her trilogy that began with The Strange Case of the Alchemist’s Daughter and ended with The Sinister Mystery of the Mesmerizing Girl. Follow her on Instagram @theodoragoss.





Photography: **JOVANA RIKALO**

@jovanarikalo

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Mushrooms: Ana Youkhana @ana_youkhana

Decor: Tandrbal @tandrbal

ODE TO FOXFIRE

by Leigh Ann Henion

Some people carry wicker baskets into the woods and fill them with chanterelles and morels. They gather wild mushrooms to pop into soups and sprinkle on salads. I occasionally enjoy mushrooms myself, baked into focaccia or simmered with vegetables. But when I go into the woods with an eye toward fungi, I'm not usually hoping to harvest dinner. I'm hunting for glimpses of wonder.

I think mushrooms are always interesting, but bioluminescent mushroom species—often referred to as foxfire—are especially precious, because they glow with living light. Foxfire turns forest floors into dreamworlds, the realm of fairy tales and mystical creatures. The mushrooms seem too magical to be real, but foxfire—ounce for ounce, arguably the most enchanted fungi in all the land—is as real as real can be. And you can find it all over the world. Bioluminescent mushrooms glow in North American hardwood forests, under the rain-dripping leaves of Brazil, and among the bamboo groves of Japan. Spin a globe under your finger and you'll likely find foxfire not far from wherever your pointer lands.

Historically, various species of foxfire were collected in jars to serve as lanterns. The mushrooms have been used to outline pathways in the dark, and they once illuminated the hulls of early submarines. Our word *foxfire* is thought to have derived from the French *faux*, for “false,” making the term “fake fire.” But whatever the etymology, almost everywhere foxfire is found, folklore associates it with mysterious, supernatural forces—and often with those fire-furred woodland animals. In Japan, for example, foxfire is associated with ghostly light said to appear in the presence of foxes. In Finland, foxes are famously known to move through the woods with brushy tails that twinkle. It's rumored that they're sometimes able to even ignite things with their tails, as though they're painting with fire.

In my home region of southern Appalachia—where foxes flit out of woods with regularity and foxfire fungi is abundant—foxfire species include jack-o'-lantern mushrooms, large and orange as pumpkins, and bitter oysters that in the dark look



like coins of light. To find them, I've learned that patience is required. Glowing mushrooms are subtle; they reveal themselves only to those who allow their night vision to ripen.

When I set out to find foxfire, I take time to experience light sifting out of this world. I rest on mossy logs and let my eyes adjust slowly, in unison with dusk. In time, I can often see mycelium consuming fallen leaves, like glowing cotton candy on the forest floor, whereas before dark I saw only clumps of ordinary leaf litter. Sometimes only in the dark is the ordinary revealed to be extraordinary. Of this, foxfire is a beautiful reminder.

Many mushrooms release their spores in tiny clouds that swirl in the wind. I have never seen it myself, but I've heard that when bioluminescent mushrooms do this, their spores glow in midair as miniature clouds of light. That seems worth seeking out—a quest yet to be undertaken. In the fungal world, there's always something magical awaiting.

Typically, I don't carry a basket with me when I wander in search of foxfire. I leave my finds where they lie. Sometimes, though, when I find a small branch covered in bitter oysters, it's hard to resist picking it up and carrying it for a while. Always, on instinct, I wave it through the air to watch light dance. Each time I feel as though the forest has gifted me a wand that can cast spells.

Bitter oysters are not something you'd want to simmer in stew or toss in a salad. But it's impossible to question their value if you've ever seen them alight. In a world that seems so overexplored and overlit with artificial light, discovering glowing mushrooms in natural darkness delivers a giant helping of awe. In this way, foraging inedible foxfire provides its own sort of nourishment.



Henion's book *Night Magic*, published by Algonquin Books, can be found wherever books are sold. Learn more about Leigh Ann Henion at leighannhenion.com.

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The Mushroom Oracle

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AN APPALACHIAN LOVE STORY

Four new mushroom creations by Lauren May aka Must Love Herbs

Many moons ago, when I was a young child, my mother headed into our beloved Appalachian Mountains and didn't return home until late in the evening, when I was already asleep. The next morning I woke to see her standing in my bedroom doorway with an absolutely enormous boletus mushroom in her arms. It had a round brown cap and a thick white stalk. She held it like a trophy that she couldn't wait to share with me.

I'd never laid my eyes on anything more beautiful.

She'd found it, she said, close to home, in a little mossy patch by itself, hidden away in the forest surrounding us. I don't know

how that boletus had grown to be that size without being eaten by *something*, but it seemed like some kind of miracle in her arms that day.

It's one of my favorite core memories, my mother holding that giant boletus. And though it was edible and we ate mushrooms at nearly every meal back then (and still do, as it happens), none of us would touch it. We couldn't—it was just far too beautiful. Eventually, it rotted away. And though I've continued to live in this part of Kentucky, and so has my mother—in fact, my family has lived in this same thirty square miles of land for more than 200 years—none of us have seen a

mushroom that big before or since.

That boletus is what sparked my lifelong love for mushrooms, along with its bearer, of course. My mother was and is the bona fide mushroom queen, a real child of the '70s. She was the one who was always hunting and cultivating and collecting mushrooms, and she seems to have passed that gene on to me.

In addition to foraging, growing, and cooking with mushrooms, I often incorporate marzipan and whatever other kind of baked sugary mushroom I can dream of into my confections. (See above for a few examples!) For this mushroom-dedicated issue, editor Carolyn Turgeon suggested I create *four* new ultra-special mushroom-themed desserts and let my imagination go wild.

So of course, my mind went straight back to that boletus, which I re-created as the chocolate toadstool cake you see on page 26, as an homage to my mother and to my love of mushrooms generally. I was a bit intimidated at first, since I'd

never made a stacked cake like that and wasn't sure it'd hold, but the support dowel worked great and in the end it was pretty easy. Most things are, I find. The cake looks exactly like the mushroom my mother was holding that summer morning, just down the road from where I'm writing this now. And you can imagine her surprised and delighted reaction when I presented my creation to her the way she presented her long-ago trophy to me!

I've also created a spring mushroom pie, some lavender shortbread tea cookies that look just like the little purple mushrooms (*wood blewit* to be precise) that pop up all over our garden in spring, and a carrot-cake log covered with oyster mushrooms like the kind that grow up and down the road I live on (except, sadly, mine aren't that same gorgeous pink).

I hope you enjoy them all. I, for one, can't imagine my life without mushrooms and the magic they bring us. How lucky we are to live in a world full of fungi!

SPRING MUSHROOM PIE





SPRING MUSHROOM PIE



*5 cups mixed mushrooms**
¾ cup pearl onions (halved)
1 cup carrots (peeled and sliced)
1 teaspoon fresh thyme
1 teaspoon fresh rosemary (roughly chopped)
1 teaspoon fresh sage (roughly chopped)
3 cloves garlic (minced)
1 cup peas
3 tablespoons flour
2 tablespoons butter (plant-based or dairy)
¼ cup white wine
½ cup vegetable stock
3 pie crusts (your favorite recipe or store-bought)
Salt and pepper to taste
Olive oil

Preheat oven to 350°F.
Melt 2 tablespoons olive oil in the bottom of a large skillet. Add onions, carrots, herbs, and garlic to pan. Sauté for 1 to 2 minutes over medium heat until carrots are softened slightly. Add mushrooms and cook 5 to 7 minutes more. Mushrooms should be just slightly softened.

Add flour and butter. Stir to coat the

veggies. Slowly add in your white wine and then the vegetable stock. Allow to simmer several minutes until a thick sauce forms. If your sauce isn't thickening up properly, add another tablespoon of flour. Season with salt and pepper. Add the peas and stir to distribute. Remove from heat and allow to cool. While the filling is cooling, roll out the three pie crusts.

Turn your pie plate upside down on top of one of the pie crusts and trace around the pie plate so that the crust will perfectly fit on top. Set aside.

Fit your pie plate with one of the crusts and fill it with your mushroom mixture. Bake your pie, without the top, for 30 minutes or until the crust is golden.

While the pie is baking, take the second pie crust, the one you traced to fit perfectly on top of your pie, and paint it blue with gel food coloring. (You could also use ground butterfly pea blossom mixed with a little high grain alcohol.)

Then take the third crust, which you'll be using as surplus dough, and cut out mushroom shapes, leaves, vines,

stars, the moon, and even pansies—all things that remind you of spring—using cookie cutters or simply a knife and your imagination! Paint your shapes with pretty shades of gel coloring that will stand out against the blue crust. I painted my pansies purple and my moon and stars yellow and my vines bright green. Arrange them on your top crust.

This next part is unconventional, but it's much less stressful and keeps your pie decorations colorful and neat. (Trust me on this.) Bake the top decorated pie crust flat on your parchment paper on a baking sheet until golden brown. This usually takes about 20 minutes. Allow to cool completely and carefully place the top pie crust onto the baked bottom crust and filling. It should sit right on top like a giant cookie. Enjoy!

**You can use any combination, but I used a mix of wild morel, oyster, chanterelle, wood ear, black trumpet, porcini, and chicken of the woods, and store-bought shiitake, portobello, and white button.*





CHOCOLATE TOADSTOOL CAKE

- 2¼ cups all-purpose flour
- ½ cup cocoa powder
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1½ teaspoons baking soda
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- ½ cup oil (your favorite)
- ¾ cup unsweetened applesauce
- 1¾ cups sugar
- 1 cup milk (dairy or non-dairy, or buttermilk)
- 1 tablespoon vinegar (omit if using buttermilk)
- 1 cup very warm water

Preheat oven to 350°F.
Prepare two 6-inch cake pans and one 8-by-10-inch pan by greasing them and lining each with parchment paper.
In a large bowl, sift together the flour, cocoa, baking

powder, baking soda, and salt. Set aside.
To a mixing bowl, add the oil, applesauce, sugar, milk or buttermilk, and vinegar (if using). Mix on medium speed until well combined. Add the flour mixture slowly. Mix until well combined. Stop to scrape the bowl as needed.
Turn your mixer off and carefully pour in the hot water. Stir with a spatula or large spoon until fully incorporated (about 1 minute). Pour about 1⅓ cups batter into each 6-inch cake pan. Pour the remainder into the 8-by-10-inch pan. Bake all three pans for approximately 20 minutes or until a toothpick inserted in the center of each comes out clean. Remove from the oven and allow to cool 30 minutes before removing from cake pans and transferring your cakes to a wire rack to cool completely. While your cakes are cooling you can prepare the frosting.

Peanut Butter Frosting

- 1 cup softened butter (dairy or plant-based)
- 1 cup creamy peanut butter
- 3 cups powdered sugar (sifted)
- ¼ cup heavy cream (or extra creamy oat milk)

Add the butter and peanut butter to a mixing bowl. Using the whisk attachment on your electric mixer, mix the two together until smooth. With the mixer on low, add the powdered sugar a half cup at a time. One you’ve got 2 cups incorporated, add in the cream. Continue adding the powdered sugar until your desired consistency is achieved. Turn the mixer up to medium and allow the icing to whip for two minutes.

To make the cakes into a toadstool:

- Store-bought fondant (I used white and brown, but you can make the mushroom any color you like; I like to have about 20 ounces on hand of each)
- Large cake support dowel (I used a Wilton plastic dowel rod measuring ¾-by-¾-by-12¾ inches that I cut to the height of the stem)
- 6-inch round cake board (usually made of cardboard)
- 3-inch round cookie cutter
- Rolling pin
- Offset spatula
- Knife

Use the round cookie cutter to cut

mini-cakes out of the 8-by-10-inch cake. I made 5 mini-cakes. These will be the toadstool stem.

Stack each cake on top of another, spreading a thin layer of peanut butter frosting between each cake. Stop once you have reached the desired height; mine was 5 cakes high.

Place the cake support dowel through the center of the cake stack. Spread a thin layer of peanut butter frosting over the top and sides of the cake. Refrigerate and allow to chill while you work on the mushroom cap.

Take the two 6-inch rounds and stack them on top of one another on the cake board. Place a layer of peanut butter frosting between the board and the cake as well as between the two pieces of cake. Use a sharp knife to carefully cut away the two cakes until you’ve achieved a domed mushroom cap shape. It doesn’t have to be perfect. Icing will hide any imperfections.

Spread a thin layer of peanut butter frosting over the top and sides of your mushroom dome. Place it in the fridge to chill.

Place your fondant on a working surface that has been lightly dusted with powdered sugar.

Use a rolling pin to roll out the white fondant for the stem to a quarter-inch thick. You will want it to be tall and wide

enough to cover the stem. You can cut off any excess. Take your stacked cakes out of the fridge and wrap the stem evenly in fondant. Use your hands to secure the fondant to the frosting underneath. Cut off any excess. Set aside to begin working on the cap.

Roll out another piece of white fondant. Cut it into a circle big enough just to cover the bottom of the cake board. Set aside.

Roll out your brown fondant (or any color you’ve chosen) to a ¼-inch thick. Make sure your fondant circle is large enough to fully cover your mushroom cap. Bring it all the way down to cover a ½-inch lip on the bottom of the cake board. Then place white fondant evenly over the bottom. Stack the mushroom cap on top of the stem.

Use a toothpick to gently score gills in the white fondant on the underside of the cap.

You can also make a skirt on the mushroom by rolling out a scrap piece of white fondant very thinly from the base of the cap down over the top of your mushroom stem, the way I did here. Use a toothpick to add texture to it. I secured mine to the stem with a little bit of frosting.

Store the cake in the fridge until ready to serve. I decorated the cake bottom with green cake crumbs.

LAVENDER SHORTBREAD
TEA COOKIES



LAVENDER SHORTBREAD TEA COOKIES

Lavender shortbread tea cookies are made to look like the beautiful blewit mushrooms that visit my garden each spring. We use mushroom compost in our garden beds to add extra nutrients to our soil. It's a wonderful by-product of mushroom farming. Thanks to the rich organic additive, we have many types of mushrooms that grow among the flowers—truly a treat for a mushroom and flower lover such as myself!

These cookies are held together with white chocolate and adorned with a lavender glaze. The bottoms are melted milk chocolate dipped in matcha coconut flake moss.

½ cup unsalted butter, softened (or shortening)
⅔ cup light brown sugar
½ teaspoon food-safe lavender extract paste
(or 2 teaspoons dried and ground lavender buds)
½ cup heavy cream (or any milk)
⅛ teaspoon salt
½ cup honey
3½ cups all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting
12 ounces white chocolate
1 teaspoon matcha powder
2 cups shredded coconut

In a mixing bowl, cream together the butter and sugar with your electric mixer until just combined. Scrape down the sides.

Add the lavender, milk, salt, and honey and mix on low until well incorporated. Add the flour slowly.

I like to use a large spoon and add a spoonful at a time until there's no flour left. Stop periodically to scrape the sides of the bowl to make sure everything is incorporated evenly. The dough should be dry but not crumbly. If it appears too crumbly, simply add a splash of heavy cream or milk.

Remove dough from bowl and wrap in plastic wrap. Refrigerate overnight.

When ready to bake:

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Shape small balls of dough into mushroom caps and mushroom stems. Place on a parchment-lined cookie sheet and bake until just set, usually 8 to 10 minutes.

Once the baked shapes have cooled, melt white chocolate and use it to hold

the cap and stem together. Dip the cookie caps in easy glaze (recipe below). Then dip the bottom of the stems in melted semisweet chocolate and moss made by mixing matcha and shredded coconut together. Add a teaspoon of matcha to two cups of shredded coconut until the desired color is achieved.

Lavender Glaze

1 cup confectioner's sugar
1½ tablespoons heavy cream
3 or 4 drops of food-safe lavender extract paste (optional)
Food-safe coloring

Mix all the ingredients together and store in an airtight container in the fridge until ready to use.



WOODLAND LOG CAKE
WITH MARZIPAN MUSHROOMS



WOODLAND LOG CAKE WITH MARZIPAN MUSHROOMS



Cake

1 cup all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking soda
¼ teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
¼ teaspoon ground cardamom
1 cup sugar
¼ cup oil (vegetable or light olive, etc.)
2 large eggs
½ cup buttermilk
Zest of 1 small orange
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1 cup finely grated carrot
½ cup crushed pineapple (drained)

Preheat oven to 350°F and line a 10-by-15-inch jelly roll sheet pan or quarter sheet pan with parchment paper. Cut the paper so it goes up the sides of the pan.

Sift the flour, baking soda, spices, and salt into a medium bowl. Set aside.

Combine sugar, oil, eggs, buttermilk, vanilla, and orange zest in a large bowl and mix until smooth.

Add in the dry ingredients. Mix until smooth. Fold in the carrots and pineapple until fully incorporated.

Slowly pour the batter into your prepared pan and use an offset spatula to smooth out any pieces of carrot that may be sticking up. Bake for 15 to 20 minutes. The cake is done when the center springs back when pressed lightly.

While baking, lay a kitchen towel flat on your counter and dust it with powdered sugar. Immediately upon removing the cake from the oven, carefully lift it out of the pan and invert onto the prepared towel.

Peel back the parchment paper and roll the cake tightly, then place the rolled cake on a wire rack to cool completely.

While the cake cools, prepare the frosting.

Frosting

1 cup salted butter, softened
4 to 5 cups powdered sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla extract

¼ cup heavy whipping cream, warmed slightly
¼ cup caramel sauce (your favorite recipe or store-bought)

In a mixing bowl, add the butter, a splash of heavy whipping cream, and the vanilla. With an electric mixer, beat together for 1 minute. Add the powdered sugar 1 cup at a time until desired consistency is achieved. Remove half the frosting to another bowl and set aside. Add in the caramel sauce and mix until completely incorporated. Set aside.

Carefully unroll the cake and spread the plain buttercream frosting about a quarter inch thick on the inside of the cake. Roll the cake back up. Cover the outside of the roll with the caramel buttercream.

Use the tip of a spoon to lightly pull through the frosting horizontally to make tree bark. Use a sharp knife to cut a thin slice from the front and back of the roll to cleanly expose the spiral inside.

I decorated my finished log with edible flowers from my garden, marzipan mushrooms, and cake-crumb moss. You can easily find edible flowers online. (I like magnoliasyarden.com, for example, but make sure you're ordering flowers that are organic and definitely edible; pansies and violas are almost always safe.) I make my own marzipan, but you can buy ready-made marzipan at the store. Sculpt it like clay, and then paint your creations with gel coloring. To make cake-crumb moss, use your favorite white cake recipe (it can even be from a box), add green coloring to the batter, and bake normally. Once the cake is baked and completely cooled, simply crumble it up and voilà!

Store your woodland log cake in an airtight container in the fridge until it's ready to serve.



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Multitudes by Kristin Kwan



Featured Artist

KRISTIN KWAN

We didn't think that this issue would be complete without these stunningly surreal oil paintings by Nebraska artist Kristin Kwan—that gleaming unicorn, those sprays of delicate shrooms, and that gorgeous girl weeping pearly tears under an Antoinette-worthy *coiffure* of curly oyster mushrooms. We're more than a little obsessed. (Who could cry amid so much beauty? Therein lies a story ...)

Kwan told us that she's always been inspired by the natural world and that growing up, what she most loved to do—even more than drawing—was ride her bike out of town and spend a whole day wandering through the woods.

When we asked why mushrooms (though of course *mushrooms!*), she said, "First off, they're just so visually appealing. They grow in such an infinite variety of shapes and textures that just beg to be painted." Their way of life is fascinating to her as well: "Being neither plant nor animal, the symbiotic relationships some have with plants, the way they appear like magic—they're always so exciting to find on a walk, so familiar and foreign at the same time."

She told us about the two fungally inflected pieces we're featuring here: *Multitudes* (above) was created for a group show with a mushroom theme. In her contribution, she wanted "to echo the dappled coat of the unicorn in the pattern of mushrooms." In *Oyster* (right), the pattern of the gills was interesting to explore and challenging to create. "They're not the most scientifically accurate oyster mushrooms," she said, "but ultimately, the girl really is the oyster in this painting, making pearls."

Each piece, she told us, "becomes almost an excuse to sit and explore an object or scene in a deep way." When she observes her subject up close like this, she starts to see in a way that she rarely gets to do in day-to-day life: The thing itself almost disappears, and a whole new dimension of colors and textures opens itself to exploration. "The painting becomes a pretext to enter this world and stay there, struggling with the materials but getting the gift of seeing beauty in every small detail." In this way, she says, she brings "the joy of seeing, the stillness in just looking," to her art.

Learn more about Kristin Kwan's work at kristinkwan.com or visit her on Instagram @kristinkwanart.



Oyster by Kristin Kwan

FABULOUS FUNGI

by Rona Berg

The Intruder (1860), by John Anster Fitzgerald



According to the lunar calendar, this is the Year of the Snake. But when it comes to beauty and wellness, 2025 is most definitely the Year of the Shroom.

By now, of course, we are all familiar with “magic mushrooms” such as psilocybin, an alternative treatment imbued with powerful medicinal properties for people who suffer with depression and anxiety and can’t tolerate pharmaceutical antidepressants. Less magical, perhaps, but still highly effective are the mushrooms popping up in topical skin care and in elixirs, gummies, and supplements intended to enhance health and beauty from the inside out.

The mushroom menu usually features lion’s mane, chaga, tremella, reishi, and cordyceps, with the latter two being the most commonly used. Those two are adaptogens “with therapeutic benefits that have been utilized for thousands of years,” says Amanda Hester, an herbalist, yogi, and founder of Balaveda, a functional energy brand featuring organic adaptogenic mushrooms.

According to Hester, reishi helps boost the immune system and reduce inflammation.

“When we feel good, we look good, and reishi plays a unique role in supporting our overall system to promote that sense of well-being,” she says. “Reishi can help detoxify the skin and leave it looking less stressed and worn.” Cordyceps helps increase circulation and oxygenate the blood, which helps nourish and bring a glow to the skin. As if that weren’t enough, she says, these mushrooms are “rich in antioxidants, meaning they mitigate oxidative stress in the body. The effects include a reduction in free radicals, which contributes to their anti-aging benefits. They can also help reduce stress, a key factor in aging, and consistent daily use may help prevent breakouts, fine lines, and wrinkles.”

With longevity the buzzword of the moment, many see mushrooms as key to holding on to both health and beauty for a long time. “In the world of adaptogens, cordyceps and reishi are known as the herbs of longevity,” says Hester. “The way adaptogens affect the body on a cellular level supports a natural healthy glow.”

Balaveda Kapow Cacao

When you’re in the mood to curl up in front of the fire with a hot beverage, try this tasty caffeine-free cacao drink—“nature’s chocolatey pixie dust”—with reishi and cordyceps mushrooms to help destress, focus, energize, and boost the immune system. It also has Ayurvedic herbs such as ginger, cardamom, and cinnamon to increase circulation and aid with digestion.

Leaf People Body Wellness Serum

Featuring calendula and reishi mushroom extract, this soothing serum is great for dry, itchy, rashy, sensitive skin. (The Leaf People Revitalizing Face Serum, with green tea and reishi, soothes lines and wrinkles and softens age spots.) With products crafted by herbalist Julie Williams, Leaf People blends modern skin-care science with organic and wild-harvested botanicals sourced from the Rocky Mountains.

Eminence Organics Snow Mushroom & Reishi Masque

Reishi mushrooms are loaded with beta-

glucans, natural sugars that help attract moisture into the skin to leave it looking plump, healthy, and hydrated. Snow mushrooms help strengthen skin elasticity and its barrier function to help reduce the appearance of fine lines and wrinkles.

Beekman 1802 Mushroom Milk Eye Cream

Peptides, soothing goat milk, and a mélange of mushrooms—lion’s mane, snow mushroom, reishi, and sclerotium—hydrate the delicate under-eye area. Always apply by gently tapping the fourth finger (it exerts the least pressure) back and forth until the eye cream is absorbed. Fragrance-free and formulated for sensitive skin, it also helps depuff and brighten dark circles under the eyes.

Brez Flow

Recently reformulated, this is a unique and functional beverage that comes in a can.

It features adaptogenic lion’s mane extract along with functional botanicals such as elderflower, agave nectar, black seed oil, and

cacao, intended to help with energy, focus, and mood. There are thirty-five calories and eight grams of natural sugar in each serving.

Shroom Skincare Mycelium Glow Brightening Serum

Featuring a cocktail of reishi, chaga, cordyceps, and maitake mushroom extracts plus vitamin C, this lightweight serum hydrates, brightens, tightens, and tones.

Herb Pharm Mushroom Wellness

Formulated with the help of a third-generation herbalist and mycologist with a Ph.D. in phylogenetics, evolutionary biology, ethnobotany, and phytochemistry, Herb Pharm has devoted an entire line to mushrooms. The USDA-certified organic supplements offer cordyceps, lion’s mane, reishi, and turkey tail, each with benefits that range from cognitive health to healthy aging and more.



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STAGHEAD DESIGNS

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THE CHARISMATIC MUSHROOM

Far-flung webs of fantastic fungi might change your mind about minds ... just ask Alice

BY SUSANN COKAL



J. J. Grandville

My husband and I live in a 125-year-old farmhouse where the land has been producing one major crop these days: Fungus. It is thriving. We have trails of wide-capped parasols, shingled colonies of turkey tails and frilly oyster mushrooms, and high up in one tree, a shaggy, slow-growing lion's mane that we occasionally harvest because eating it is good for the brain. When we first experienced this bounty, I was dismayed to think that these gorgeous, spongy, odd little (or big) miracles are growing from places where our beloved trees are decaying. I'm just glad that they're there.

Truth is, this hasn't been a great couple of years for the trees in our neighborhood, as wind or human so-called developers have knocked them down. But it has been a rich and beautiful time for fungus. Some of the magnolias are said to have stood for more than 250 years, and they're fine, but the line of elms and maples planted along the drive when the house was new have mostly lived out their natural lives, and individual trees have been dying out too. But the underground fungal web that fruits into mushrooms has been here for ... who knows how long? And it is having a grand time helping the trees (and itself).

One particular reason to celebrate fungi is their ability to cooperate with other organisms, most especially Kingdom Plantae. Fungus enables a marvelous system of communication within the plant world, and scientists are only just starting to understand how it all works together. The truth is about as bizarre as an episode in one of Lewis Carroll's Alice books, in which what seems to be completely fantastical breaks down into a logic that not only makes sense but also inspires joy and hope—and reveals an even greater, even more surprising web of sentience, the ability to feel and to make certain connections.

In fact, that's a good place to start—with Alice. She knows the underground world pretty well.

"Who Are You?": On Charismatic Species

Without fungus, life on Earth would be unrecognizable. It is all around us (and on us and in us); we just don't always know how to see it.

That's why every kingdom needs a poster child, a charismatic citizen that lures others in and makes them care. The fungus kingdom is not short on that kind of rock star, because mushrooms are glamorous. We take their pictures; we tell their stories. We want to be around them, and we beg them to reveal themselves. We revere them as a symbol of spiritual growth.

So let's talk for a moment about the most famous mushroom in the history of mushrooms, one of the stars of every version of *Alice in Wonderland* that has manifested since the book was first published in 1865: that strange fungus upon which a blue Caterpillar sits smoking a hookah. (Rather scandalous, I've always thought: Shouldn't we know what's in that hookah?) Alice stands up on tiptoes to get a good look, and Chapter 5, "Advice from a Caterpillar," begins:

The Caterpillar and Alice looked at each other for some time in silence: at last the Caterpillar took the hookah out of its mouth, and addressed her in a languid, sleepy voice.

"Who are you?" said the Caterpillar.

This was not an encouraging opening for a conversation.

Maybe not for Alice, but "*Who are you?*" (emphasis on both words) had been quite the catchphrase in London around 1841 and after—a way of saying hello in a tavern or, I would guess, a hookah lounge.

Who—or what—is Alice, and how does she fit into this strange world? The plot of *Wonderland* keeps asking how to classify Alice, physically as well as figuratively. The underground world varies confusingly in scale, and she is constantly caught between returning to her old self and adapting to fit each new



British Library / Alamy Stock Photo

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll, illustrated by Gwynedd M. Hudson

setting. Along the way, mistakes are made. Her head might shoot suddenly through a treetop, or she might nearly drown in a sea of her own tears. This is the adolescent condition; it’s also the human condition: looking for your place amid a messy set of deceptive signals and slippery language, growing, shrinking, “saying what you mean” *vs.* “meaning what you say,” to borrow from a famous conversation between Alice and the March Hare.

There’s a parallel question in *Wonderland* for all of us: How do we define the objects and creatures we encounter? Or rather, how do we recognize them for what they are, beyond our own preconceived ideas? That mushroom, for example ... It might not be what you’ve always thought it was.

Scientists are only starting to untangle the fungus puzzle—how it lives, *where* it lives, and even what it is. Our word *mushroom* seems to derive from the medieval French *mousseron*, which refers to moss. For most of scientific history, fungus was part of the plant kingdom. But then researchers started to scratch their heads: Fungus does not photosynthesize and turn light into nutrients, as plants do. Its cells are made of chitin, like insects’ and crustaceans’ exoskeletons (which are very close to human hair). It is a heterotroph, meaning it cannot produce its own food; to absorb nutrients, it takes in molecules of other organisms—a fancy way of saying it eats basically the way animals do. Some species (like the turkey tails on our fallen logs) secrete digestive enzymes to hurry the process along.

So since 1968, we have recognized Kingdom Fungi. Long may it flourish!

And keep in mind that as we study it, it might be studying us. In *The Light Eaters: How the Unseen World of Plant Intelligence Offers a New Understanding of Life on Earth*, author Zoë Schlanger proves that the animal brain is only one form of “mind,” only one way to think of intelligence, memory, decision-making, and sentience. We need to expand our idea of intelligence to embrace other kingdoms.

Because mushrooms might be smart.

Mycelium Magic

One morning after a rain, you find a tiny, pale brown nub of a meadow mushroom or shaggy parasol in the grass; by evening, it’s tripled in size and introduced a few younger friends. Sometimes you want to plunk down in the grass and watch it grow taller and wider in real time, see the stalk thicken, maybe even grow tough and woody. It grows so fast that the top layers of the cap peel partly away in delicate scales. Specks of earth cling to the surface before a warm sun dries them and the wind sends them off on their way.

Glance at a mushroom like the Caterpillar’s and you’re looking at a cap, a stem, perhaps a little ring (a skirt) around the middle, a fleshy volva where the stem meets the ground. Pluck the mushroom and you can admire soft, deep-channeled gills under the cap. Squeeze it; the texture of the flesh varies from delicate

to rubbery. At the bottom of the stalk, you’ll probably also see a few rootlike extensions. These are not actually roots but hyphae (singular: hypha), thready tendrils that are what we might call the “real” fungus—the unglamorous body of the everyday organism.

Mushrooms themselves are only a small subset of worldwide fungus. You probably see hyphae without knowing it. Most do grow underground, but you’ll also find them on old pots of sauce in your refrigerator, or in webby drifts on some trees and plants. By far the greatest bulk of fungus is this much less glamorous stringy sort that could wrap the world a thousand times over—and in fact already does so, both above and below the soil.

Underground, the hyphae branch and interweave to form a body called a mycelium. Some of the largest living organisms in the world are not blue whales or giant sequoias but networks of honey fungi, *Armillaria*. There’s a mycelium in Oregon that weighs uncountable hundreds of tons, occupies almost four square miles, and is about, oh, 2,800 years old. It wins charisma points for sheer size alone. And it is *not* alone (she intoned darkly).

Where there is an opportunity such as a fallen log—a food source that will last for a while—hyphae move in and start feeding. They are the reason that the log gets soft, then crumbly, then powders into dust. When Greg and I bought our farmhouse, for example, at one side of the driveway there stood a dead tree with a few eerily armlike branches. One day a branch fell, and within about a year it had decayed enough to have dissolved almost entirely into the jumble of grass and weeds that we hope will return to a native-plant meadow. Over the course of a decade, the tree shed the rest of its branches but rather surprisingly has stayed otherwise upright; there’s now just a pile tending to dust next to a straight-up trunk slowly decomposing. One morning we’ll go out and find it collapsed on the ground, which will make the fungi very happy.

When deadwood is nearly used up, the hyphae fruit into mushrooms, whose function is to send spores into the world and advance the mycelium to richer feeding grounds (more about that process later). Once the shroom fulfills its purpose, it shrinks back to earth.

But again and again, the magic renews: that first little bump of a new mushroom fruit. Our latest colony sprang to visible life one melancholy morning just when I’d thought my own life held no more surprises, at least nothing good. The wee lump summoned others; together they formed a fairy ring, which happens when hyphae spread out regularly from an original spore and, about a year later, fruit into an enchanting circle. (But be careful about stepping into the kind of enchantment you’ll find there; you might interrupt a gathering of witches, or a giant toad might steal one of your eyes.)

We’ve long known that mushrooms contribute to the environment by breaking decaying plant matter down into nutrients such as phosphorus, good for building healthy soil. Now,

thanks to a maverick band of mycologists (fungus specialists), we know very much more than even, say, ten years ago. Take, for example, Merlin Sheldrake, whose landmark book, *Entangled Life*, will rock your own personal fungus-based world with one surprise after another. As he says in his introduction, “Many of the most dramatic events on Earth have been—and continue to be—a result of fungal activity.” That means all five global extinctions, famines, phases of group madness ... And the renewal of hope. Fungi survived the end of the dinosaurs. They will survive the end of us. After the bombing of Hiroshima, the first living thing to sprout was a matsutake mushroom.

Fungi also might offer a means to continue our way of life. We know that certain species can break down toxins from oil and chemical spills. We know that their various parts can be developed into textiles and building materials. And mycologists estimate that we’ve discovered and studied only about six percent of the fungal species on Earth. Imagine the possibilities ... The cleverest ones could be evading us.

“The other side of *what?*”

And now back to Alice and that Caterpillar. When they meet, Alice is just three inches tall, what she calls a “wretched” height. (Remember, she does not feel like herself at this point.) The Caterpillar (not wretched, in fact rather pleased with himself) is the same size. The mushroom is much larger; how much so depends on who has illustrated the edition you’re reading.

Sitting on all that potential for growth and renewal (or shrinkage and recycling), the Caterpillar offers a famous but cryptic instruction: “One side will make you grow taller, and the other side will make you grow shorter.”

“One side of what? The other side of what?” thought Alice to herself.

“Of the mushroom,” said the Caterpillar, just as if she had asked it aloud; and in another moment it was out of sight.

How is a girl to parse the vanished worm’s advice? (Forget for a moment that he just read her mind, which is both amazing and more than a little invasive.) The mushroom is round and doesn’t have “sides” as she’s used to thinking of them. Here’s a conundrum of adolescence: Not only do you have to figure out how to fit in, you have to do it without instructions.

Perhaps there is some inter-kingdom sympathy here, with the way girls and mushrooms grow, shrink, and divide. Alice relies on a simple and resourceful strategy: “at last she stretched her arms round it as far as they would go, and broke off a bit of the edge with each hand.” By nibbling experimentally from one fist, then the other, Alice manages—after some dramatic mishaps—to get to her “usual” height.

And then, in the very next paragraph, she shrinks herself down to nine inches so that she can enter an intriguing small house. *Alice*, I want to cry. *You went to so much trouble to get back to yourself!* And she would probably answer that she still doesn’t



Arthur Rackham

know who that self is. I suppose the Caterpillar is in the same state; it probably disappeared in order to turn into a butterfly, which means spinning a cocoon, dissolving into jelly, and slowly re-forming into a winged insect ready to propagate.

This episode in Alice’s adventures has become part of a cultural lexicon, with two charismatic species (plus Alice), a visual that pops into your mind as soon as you hear *Alice* or *mushroom*, and a little life advice ... But now we should figure out what Alice is actually eating, and what’s in it for the mushroom.

Getting Into the Gills

When Alice breaks off her handfuls, she’s probably not grabbing only the edges of the cap (officially called the margin in mycological circles). Odds are that she gets a good sample of the gills on the underside.

Within the gills grow more hyphae, and they in turn grow billions of microscopic spores, about a thousand of which could fit on the head of a pin before you’d take much notice. Spores are the way mushroom fungi move from one location to another, in an asexual form of reproduction that involves no combining of genetic material. Many will fall to unwelcoming ground, but if there’s a good source of moisture (mushrooms need lots of water), the spore will germinate into more of the branching hyphae, thus moving the same fungal body a few feet along.

If the mycelium from more than one species occupies a spot, the hyphae adapt. They detect not only light but also color and texture, and they make decisions about where to branch based on those perceptions. So they demonstrate the intelligence and executive function that have helped them establish their kingdom on every continent, even in the Arctic Circle and Antarctica. And they’ve done it all without a recognizable nervous system—which means mushrooms may be sensitive in many ways, but they do not feel pain and pleasure in the way we do.

We find answers and surprises in reproduction. Spores are not the only way to make baby mushrooms. Hyphae can also get their groove on sexually, when filaments from different spores combine and fuse—and here you’ll see a remarkable sentience. When they bond in order to fruit into mushrooms, they show

The Charismatic Mushroom

Susann Cokal

sensitivity to gravity; when they join each other sexually, tendril to tendril, each hypha is able to distinguish between itself, an other ... and a different other who is not part of the original coupling. So they recognize and remember each other, which means they can learn, another sign of intelligence. In this case, polyamory seems to be out.

The news gets even more sensational. Scientists have recently discovered something special about the use of spores, different from what we see in, say, ferns: The scattering isn't entirely passive. Sure, many species spread spores simply by bursting open. (Who doesn't love to touch a puffball and watch it explode?) A 2016 study shows that tens of thousands of these species can also actively create conditions for a launch by summoning their own miniature winds.

Clever fungi might also see an opportunity to spread when a tiny girl looking for her place in the world takes a handful from either "side" of a round cap ... and then off she walks, nibbling, with spores probably streaming from the gills in her hands and looking for their new home.

Yes, young Alice is a super-spreader. And, inadvertently, a symbiotic friend to the organism that helps her find herself.

So one fungus, plus a talking Caterpillar, helps another species navigate a confusing environment. This is, in fact, what fungus often does for the world. And only recently have we started to see how important it is. Like Alice, we are searching for the complete instructions, the nibbles and keys that will help us make our way through a world in which conditions are changing moment to moment.

Inter-Organism Communication

Mushrooms prove that nonhuman species have the ability to communicate, even across kingdom lines. In Carroll's day, it was a mere fantasy, or at best a hypothesis tossed out by slightly crackpot scientists, but we know now that plants living near each other do develop systems for helping each other, and they use fungus to facilitate communication. I'm talking about the mycorrhizal network, that web of symbiotic relationships, gifts, and acts of service (to borrow from the famous five love languages) between fungi and plants. Members of the two kingdoms were in a relationship for 50 million years before plants bothered to evolve roots that would draw nutrients from elsewhere. There are effectively no wild plants whose roots aren't entangled with fungal threads.

Let us consider the trees. An old, well-established tree becomes the nerve center of the network and is called a hub or a mother. The mycelium clusters around that tree's roots, carrying messages between the hub and the other connected trees. If one of those enters distress—not enough light, not enough water, thus not making enough of the sugar it needs to survive—it puts out a signal. The fungal network carries the information to the mother tree, who sends sugar and other nutrients from a reserve. The

fungus gets a commission that amounts to ten to thirty percent of the sugar passed along. The fungi seem to vary the rate of exchange, charging a plant (for example) more sugar when the fungi are short on phosphorus, then reducing the rate in good times. How do they make their calculations and manage the communication through a potentially enormous mycelium? We still don't know.

Of course, a relationship can and does veer into exploitation, particularly as symbiosis continues with Kingdom Animalia. Colonies of leaf-cutter ants the world over literally live to tend a fungus that grows in underground hollows; with a cultlike devotion, the ants feed it their snippets of leaves. We humans, a bit more savvy about exploiting others, grow and harvest mushrooms and truffles because we just can't get enough of them on our dinner plates. We use yeast for alcohol, bread, and more; the citric acid in soda comes from fungi, and don't get me started on medicine.

Actually, do get me started, because it's pretty awesome. When something ails us, the medicines with which we treat it might well have been developed from mold. A 50,000-year-old Neanderthal jaw shows the use of penicillin-generating molds, and that is just one of many fungus-based medicines used through the ages. Medicinal fungi have been found everywhere from the pouches of the Neolithic age (RIP, Ötzi the Iceman, circa 3350 to 3105 BCE) to the recipes on papyri from ancient Egypt (where mushrooms were the gift of storm god Set and his lightning bolts; the Greeks believed Zeus used the same delivery method) to the herbarium of the medieval wise woman (even after the wider culture decided mushrooms were *déclassé* and not to be eaten, healers *knew*) and an abundance of modern prescriptions for anxiety, bacterial infections, and more. Fungi are potent in part because our molecules are strikingly similar to theirs; what's good for a mushroom can also be good for you and me. And to borrow another moment from Alice, the grin on the Cheshire Cat—Sheldrake attributes it (possibly) to psilocybin ("magic") mushrooms, which produce feelings of love, joy, and connection that some researchers think might be useful for treating a number of psychiatric disorders.

But our relationship with fungi can also be cataclysmic. Mold can linger even in the dry conditions of a mummy's tomb and then spring back to life when a moist human breathes it in. At least one microbiologist is convinced that species within the genus *Aspergillus* caused the infamous curse that killed off archaeologists who unsealed Egyptian mummies.

They Speak, Therefore They Live

Leaving fungi aside for a moment, Alice's second big episode of inter-kingdom communication comes in *Through the Looking-Glass*, in an early chapter that all but roots her in the titular "Garden of Live Flowers." When we read it, we should remember that fungi were considered plants at the time Carroll was writing.



Fungi at Home (1897),
Victorian botanical illustration

At first, Alice is trapped by her desire to move out of the Looking-Glass house and into the world. Many times, she sets out on the front path and can get no farther than the garden before a twist leads her back to the front door. (Isn't that always the way with ambition?) Stopping in frustration at a flower bed, she wishes aloud that a Tiger-lily could talk—and much to her surprise, she gets a miffy answer: "We *can talk* ... when there's anyone worth talking *to*."

Alice is flummoxed. This is the first time in her adventures that she's met creatures with both leaves and voices, plants who are able to think and to move around enough to communicate. They are surprisingly sentient beings, which is why, I believe, Carroll calls them "*Live Flowers*." They feel, therefore they speak; they think, therefore they are fully alive in the sense Descartes meant when he said, "I think, therefore I am."

Other flowers chime in: a Rose, some Daisies, Violets, Larkspur, and a Dahlia. Each one of them carries a symbolic meaning in the Victorian language of cut flowers and bouquets—but Carroll (who studied botany) is even more interested in the *speech* of these flowers. The regal Rose is as bossy as the Red Queen; the Daisies' childlike prattle is unfiltered nitpicking. And it gets worse. They think she must be one of them, just a bit more mobile ... and significantly less attractive.

As proof that to be alive is to criticize, they apply their intelligence to suggest that Alice's petals should curl up more, that she looks faded, and so on. Yes, the talking flowers are mean girls. A lazy Violet even says, "I never saw anybody that looked stupider," sounding rather stupid herself, and the Rose wonders if Alice ever thinks at all. They take one look and decide that on the great ladder of sentience, she has a lot of catching up to do.

I'm not going to try to claim that the Live Flowers are able to speak because of the mycorrhizal network. But the network might have been a *partial* inspiration for some of the interconnectedness here. The word *mycelium* was first used in 1836, and fungus would have been covered in Carroll's botany studies.

But he could not have known that the sort of interactions he writes for these plants actually do take place on a simpler level, according to what researchers have recently discovered: Plants (like fungi) show both intelligence and memory. They recognize individual members of their own genetic families. And as Schlanger writes in *The Light Eaters*, some plants remember their insect predators and their attackers' likes and dislikes. They are able to signal for other, bigger predators to come gobble up the most pesky bugs. That kind of analytical thinking and communication is Alice-level magic to me (and a sign that our girl should be on best behavior).

From Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-glass* (1870), illustration by John Tenniel



Retroimages / iStockphoto Getty Images

Sentience Is Punny

Those clever Live Flowers have just one problem. They are talkative because they cannot sleep through a human intrusion. “Put your hand down and feel the ground,” says the Tiger-lily, “then you’ll know why.” Most gardens have soft beds, but this one is very hard.

Carroll’s wordplay is both innocent and sophisticated. The flowers’ bed is hard; beds are for sleeping; in a hard bed, it is impossible to sleep. We can follow the logic. But the Tiger-lily isn’t sentient enough to hold multiple meanings in mind, so she cannot quite achieve the nuanced consciousness to which Carroll is playing, even (especially) in a book supposedly for children.

Perhaps if Alice would pick up a trowel and loosen the earth, she would create new space for the mycelia that coexist with the flowers. Then the flowers could get some sugar and some rest, which should improve their personalities. And Alice’s character as well ... because, dear friends, it is my duty to report that this chapter reveals a dark side to our representative abroad.

There are no other talking plants in the Alice books. Plants are objectified, modified (those painted roses at the end of *Wonderland*), collected in the bottom of a rowboat, only to vanish as Alice’s greed makes her grab for yet another fragrant rush (my favorite chapter). Even the blue Caterpillar’s remarkable mushroom is just a tool: The Caterpillar sits on it, and Alice breaks off handfuls to eat. So it might at first feel normal when she exclaims to the flowers, “If you don’t hold your tongues, I’ll pick you!”

But I, for one, feel a terrible violation. One talking flower (or animal) should not destroy another. Alice has recognized the innate dignity of many new creatures—for example, she calls the Caterpillar “Sir” (despite the “it” pronoun). So why does she think it’s okay to threaten the Tiger-lily?

Schlanger explores a similar conundrum. Scientists and naturalists are constantly discovering new signs of what we have to recognize as intelligence in the Kingdom Plantae. So to what degree should you acknowledge their “personhood” and respect their autonomy “not because you know you ‘should,’” Schlanger writes, “but because ... doing otherwise would violate your own moral personhood”?

I don’t have an answer, but the flowers, interestingly, are not alarmed. The Rose says the tree is there to protect them. How can it do that? Well, she says, it might bark.

“It says ‘Bough-wough!’” cried a Daisy. “That’s why its branches are called boughs!”

Okay, I’ve just read those lines twenty times and I still can’t help laughing. Carroll’s puns and double meanings break down the language and fertilize it; they create a jokey space in which aggression ends. Now go ahead—*mush* and *room* are begging you to play around. Put the fun into *fungi*; sniff out some sentient scents.

It pleases me to imagine the trees around my house bough-

woughing to warn away the next developer who wants to subdivide the acreage next door. And I’m very glad to know that, puns aside, when more stress comes, the trees will help each other—and the fungal network will be part of it.

Plays on words approached with simple logic carry Alice across the chessboard landscape on the other side of the looking-glass. Seven chapters later, she reaches the end of squares and transforms from a pawn into a queen with a crown: She fruits, in other words, and grows both the spiky petals that the flowers want for her and the elaborate cap that I, at least, see as the mushroom inside her coming out. She joins the aggressive Red Queen and the ditzy White Queen as rulers—and has a puntastic conversation about ground flour and picking flowers from the ground—but she doesn’t really try to take control of the creatures she’s met. The kingdom belongs to all of them. Theirs is still a mysterious, confusing, weird, and beautiful world in which the nature of life and the meaning of “life” are constantly redefined.

Does sentience make sense? No, not yet. Does it rule the world? Maybe, if we stop thinking of ourselves as its only sentinels.

The mushrooms, for one thing, are on the move.



Susann Cokal lives in an overgrown farmhouse and encourages just about any tree that wants to take root. Her four novels include the award-winning *Kingdom of Little Wounds* and *Mermaid Moon*. Visit her online at susanncokal.com.



Illustrations of British Mycology by Anna Maria Hussey (1805-1853)

CAN MUSHROOMS SAVE THE PLANET?

A Conversation with Paul Stamets by Rona Berg

Renowned mycologist Paul Stamets is, simply put, mad about mushrooms. From tame little grocery-store white buttons to flamboyant foraged chanterelles, there isn’t much that Stamets doesn’t know about the funky fungi. A recently discovered species of magic mushroom has even been named after him: *Psilocybe stametsii*, which was unearthed in a cloud forest in Ecuador.

Stamets is the author of *Mycelium Running: How Mushrooms Can Help Save the World* and the forthcoming *Psilocybin Mushrooms in Their Natural Habitats*, and he has delivered brilliant talks for TED and TEDMed. He’s devoted his life to studying and sharing the magic of mushrooms, yet he’s barely gotten started. That’s because there is just so much to learn—culinarily, medically, nutritionally, spiritually, and beyond.

Mushrooms are especially good at building things up and breaking them down. The root structure of mushrooms—mycelium—is so strong that it’s being used to build bricks that might eventually be used to construct buildings. At the same time, through a process called mycoremediation, mycelium breaks down pollutants, pesticides, heavy metals, even radiation in the soil. Mushrooms are scavengers—their entire raison d’être is to digest and decompose other plants—which makes them a rich source of vitamins, enzymes, and active compounds that are being studied to cure disease. When it comes to human and environmental health, the curative possibilities, Stamets says, are potentially limitless.

Mushrooms are creepy, delicious, poisonous, and profound—but mostly miraculous. We talked to Stamets to find out more.

What first attracted you to mushrooms?

My parents warned me about wild mushrooms—that they were dangerous. Yet our family loved button mushrooms. I was always curious about my parents’ fears and was attracted to the study of this “forbidden fruit.”

Why do you think mushrooms have become so popular nowadays? And why should our readers be excited about mushrooms now?

There is a confluence of positive realizations about mushrooms: so many colorful species, so many delicious edibles. Taking family field trips into the woods has centered families in shared positive experiences. Mushrooms also help the immune system and are packed with antioxidants. They can support nerve health. In addition, the research surrounding psilocybin mushrooms has opened up so many new eyes to this exciting yet understudied field of science. Moreover, the art world has rediscovered mushrooms, as well as the film community. [Stamets was featured in the documentary film *Fantastic Fungi*, by award-winning cinematographer, director and producer Louie Schwartzberg; along with best-selling author Michael Pollan, Dr. Andrew Weil, Timothy Leary, and others.]

You recently recommended a beautiful fungal lunar calendar designed by artist Grace Ng Dung, as well as some of Heather Brooks’s mushroom collages. [Her art site, Small Woodland Things, is also featured in this issue.] Can you talk about other mushroom-related art you’re enjoying right now?

I’m a big fan of Alex and Allyson Grey, Autumn Skye, Mark Hansen, and many others. I love artists who accurately portray mushrooms. It tells me these artists are not only skilled in painting but know the subject matter personally. They have my great respect.

What are some of the most exciting developments in mycology?

Mushroom mycelium is beneath every footstep you take. It influences and can support the immune systems of diverse animals and plants. Mushroom mycelium is the immune system of the mushroom life cycle, and we can tap into these immunologically active networks to potentially help our health. There is preliminary cutting-edge research showing that mushroom mycelium of turkey tail and agarikon, grown on grain, can support innate immunity. While this study is pending publication, the results are very exciting.

What might surprise our readers the most to learn about mushrooms?

That about 90 percent of them have not yet been identified!

How do strangers react when you tell them what you do?

They used to avoid me and the subject. Now they’re excited to speak to me, from children to grandparents. Everywhere I go, people approach me with smiles, curiosity, respect—and often a wink!

What are some of the best mushrooms to include in your diet and why?

Foodwise: shiitake, maitake, oysters, enoki, porcini, truffles, and pine mushrooms. For support of immunity and cognitive health: turkey tail, agarikon, reishi, chaga, and lion’s mane.

Do you forage for mushrooms?

Yes! Every day as I walk. My favorites are pine mushrooms, hedgehogs, chanterelles, winter chanterelles, porcini, oysters, lobsters, and candy caps for culinary purposes; turkey tails and ganodermas for health supporting purposes; cyans and liberty caps for spiritual purposes.

But it is the wide range of colors, forms, and mysterious species that excite me. I don’t have to pick them to enjoy them.

One of the most common revelations for those new to this subject—often students of mycologists—is that they had no idea how diverse and beautiful mushrooms are, and that they’re everywhere. I often hear them question themselves: “How could I not have noticed them before?”

What advice can you share for other foragers?

Join a mycological society. See namyco.org for a national and international registry.

How do you stay enchanted?

Mushrooms and mycologists build bridges across cultures, religions, politics, and generations. They bring us together, and the excitement, the eureka moment, is a shared experience in wonder, delight, science, and comradery. Mushrooms, particularly psilocybin mushrooms, make us nicer people—and smarter too!

When you say that “mushrooms and mycologists build bridges across

cultures, religions, politics and generations,” what do you mean?

Throughout the world, people have discovered mushrooms, and through trial and error, they have come to know which mushrooms are safe to consume and which ones are not. Moreover, many polypore mushrooms like turkey tails have been used for enhancing health by making teas or used, as in the case of some Native Americans, as a chewing gum for dental health.

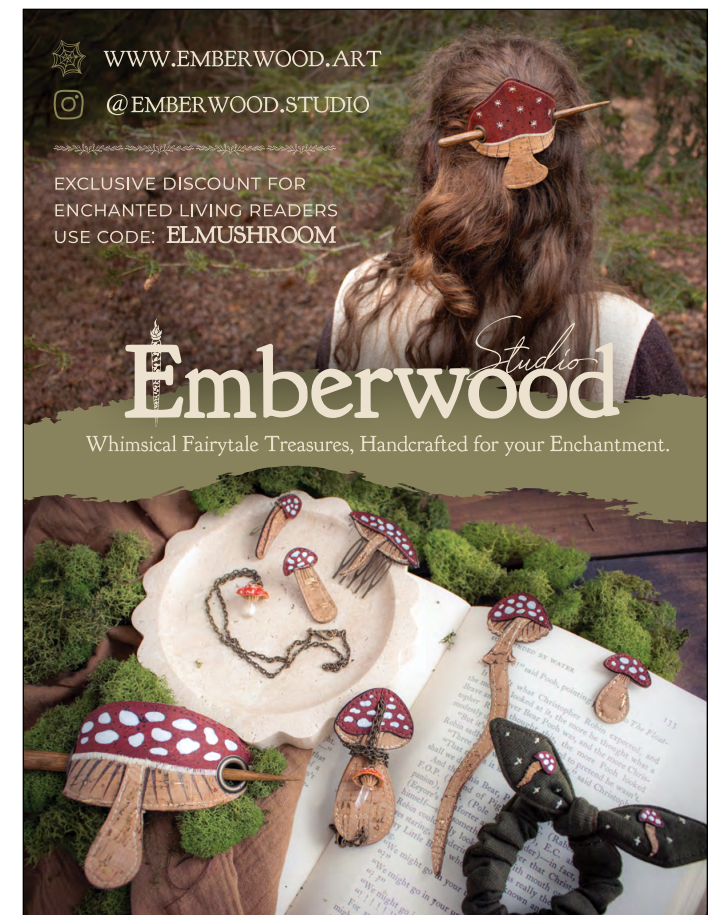
When people from one region of the world travel to new lands, they bring that cultural myco-knowledge with them. A good example is the popularity of the pine mushroom, a.k.a. matsutake. In the 1970s, few Americans of European descent consumed these mushrooms. I joined a mycological society around 1975, and our Japanese members brought these mushrooms to our attention. They relished in the fact we had not awakened to them in the Pacific Northwest, as competition for finding them in Japan

was fierce, and indeed a “national sport.” The French and Italian cultures helped bring our attention to boletus (ceps, porcini). From Mesoamerica to Russia to South Africa, many cultures have deep love for mushrooms. These are just a few examples of mushrooms bridging cultures across continents. As humans migrate, mycological knowledge is shared and spread.



To learn more about Stamets’s work, visit fungi.com, hostdefense.com, instagram.com/paulstamets, facebook.com/paulstamets, youtube.com/paulstamets, and listen to his TED and TEDMed talks on YouTube.

Note: The statements made throughout this article have not been evaluated by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and are not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease.





Early Spring Finds, 2021, by Heather Brooks

TEMPORAL BEAUTIES

BY HEATHER BROOKS A.K.A. SMALL WOODLAND THINGS

Nature collage combines everything I'm most passionate about: the outdoors, working with organic materials, the ephemerality of those materials, and beautiful composition that's pleasing to the eye and other senses.

I've always felt called to the forest, and I've made art of one kind or another for as long as I can remember. I grew up around Raleigh, North Carolina, and moved west to Asheville to attend Warren Wilson College. I studied all kinds of art, including photography. After, I owned a landscaping company where I used plants and rocks in large format design to beautify a person's yard. At some point, I became aware of the work of English artist Andy Goldsworthy, who makes giant art installations from natural materials.

That, I thought. Yes! That's what I want to do.

I started collecting acorns, berries, foliage, other flora, and the occasional wasp's nest or bone from the southern Appalachian forest that begins just steps from my back door. I assembled the pieces into flat lays—outdoors, usually on lichenous stumps or some stunning bank of moss—that I could photograph before taking them apart again. I began posting my work on Instagram and discovered the creations of other nature artists online.

I noticed how many of them incorporated mushrooms—which surprised me. I'd thought that by the unwritten code of nature artists I could take only what I found loose on the ground. Then I learned that mushrooms are just the fruiting bodies of a much larger organism that exists under the soil or within a decaying branch, and that it's legal to gather them in our national forests. When you cut one off, it can still spread its spores. I had no idea!

Once I used mushrooms in my work, everything changed. And once I saw them, I saw them *everywhere*. I was blown away: I'd had no idea of the array of colors and textures and shapes. The coral fungi, cup fungi, polypores growing on the sides of trees ... I literally fell in love. I joined my local branch of the North American Mycological Association, read field guides specific to my area, and met other mushroom lovers. Mushrooms are plentiful in the southern Appalachian Mountains—anyone can find them. A person only needs to be willing to walk slowly in the woods. In July

or August, a few steps in will reveal a cluster of blaze orange chanterelles. A few more steps and there are sizable boletes. *Russulas* and *Amanitas* of every color of the rainbow are scattered throughout.

They changed my art—and in many ways they are what made collage the perfect art medium for me. As an artist in general, it can be hard sometimes to devote the time to your work or to finish a piece. But the minute you cut a mushroom you put a ticking clock on it. You really have only a day or two before it degrades, especially in the summer's humidity and heat.

So I might find a breathtaking variety of mushrooms along with some flora in a one- or two-day span. I'll supplement them with other, more durable finds—like nests or skulls or acorns. I'll arrange them quickly somewhere outside. I've invested in a good camera, which strangely enough helps me see because it helps me focus on small areas. Sometimes I'll rearrange based on what appears in the lens. And then, once I've captured what I want, I'll take the artwork apart again. I always pick out the edible mushrooms and sauté them for dinner, and leave the rest outside to spread their spores.

By collecting, cleaning, and working with these temporal beauties, I deepen my love of the woods—and every collage I assemble celebrates that connection.

Postscript: As you probably know, the southern Appalachian Mountains, and particularly my home area of western North Carolina, have been dealt a terrible blow. In late September 2024, a weather system dropped rain over us for two days straight before the last remnants of Hurricane Helene hit our area. The combination of rain, wind, and topography led to previously unseen flooding, thousands of trees down, landslides, and destruction of municipal infrastructure as well as landscape. Yet slowly but surely, we are rebuilding. This area has always relied upon robust tourism. We lost much of that last year. But while there were pockets of devastation, much of the area is just as it was before the storm. There are still mountains to climb, rivers to raft, art galleries to peruse, restaurants to dine in, and mushrooms to find. Please come see us!



Find more of Heather Brooks's art at smallwoodlandthings.com and follow her on Instagram @smallwoodlandthings.



Resplendent Woods, 2024, by Heather Brooks

BLACK GOLD CHAGA MILK TEA

BY SUSAN ILKA TUTTLE
A.K.A. WHISPER IN THE WOOD

When spring finally arrives after a long winter’s nap, you’ll find me foraging in the forests and fields that surround my home, harvesting medicinal wildflowers, plants, and mushrooms. As with any kind of activity, it’s nice to pause and fully take in the beauty that’s waking up all around us.

One of my favorite ways to carve out slow-paced, quiet time for myself and luxuriate with the plants and fungi is through a ritual of making and drinking a relaxing yet energizing natural brew made of infused chaga mushroom. Chaga grows in abundance in the dense Maine woods that surround my home.

About Chaga

Chaga, commonly known as Black Gold, the Diamond of the Forest, and the Mushroom of Immortality, is considered a powerful medicinal and magical fungus. Humans have been working with it for thousands of years, and it has an especially deep-rooted history in Siberian folk medicine. The word *chaga* comes from the Russian word *czaga*, which means mushroom.

I’ll let you in on a little secret: Chaga is not actually a mushroom (a fleshy, fruiting body) but hard mycelial armor known as sclerotia. This bulbous, parasitic body matures slowly into a corky conk (a mushroom growing from a tree trunk) with a rough, blocky texture, typically on white and yellow birch trees in the coldest regions of North America, Siberia, and Scandinavia. Maine is a chaga hotspot.

Chaga is considered an adaptogenic superfood and is revered for its high concentration of beta-glucan, a micronutrient believed to have immune-supporting properties. Sadly, chaga has become subject to commercial exploitation and overharvesting. That is why it’s imperative to harvest it in a responsible and sustainable way, from a living, standing birch tree. Look for chaga specimens that are at least the size of a large grapefruit, preferably larger, and that have a vibrant orange-brown interior. It’s best practice to leave some of it behind for regeneration, though regrowth is highly variable; it may regenerate fully in two years or not at all. It takes eight or more years for chaga to mature enough for harvesting.

Once chaga is harvested and broken into smaller chunks, it’s best dried in a dehydrator on a low temperature (around 100°F)

“*Chaga is considered an adaptogenic superfood and is revered for its high concentration of beta-glucan, a micronutrient believed to have immune-supporting properties.*”

for 24 hours. Give it a rest for one day, then dry it again for another 24 hours. If you’d rather purchase your chaga, Birch Boys is a great place to do so, as it is transparent about its use of sustainable practices. And if you’re interested in foraging for chaga yourself, I recommend doing more research: birchboys.com is a wonderful place to start.

Medicinal and Magical Attributes

Disclaimer: Before starting any course of healing, including natural remedies and supplements, consult with a health-care

professional who can help find what’s best and safest for you. If you’re taking medications, pregnant, or nursing, definitely do *not* start using chaga until you speak to a qualified medical caregiver. Chaga may interact with certain medications or cause allergic reactions in some people.

Chaga is not a psychedelic fungus, as it does not contain psilocybin. But research shows that it is rich in antioxidants and anti-inflammatories, boosts the immune system, improves energy, and can be used for soothing arthritis and managing high blood pressure. It contains antiviral properties, supports healthy blood sugar levels, lowers cholesterol, supports a healthy liver, is beneficial for digestive health, and is used in cancer therapy.

Magically speaking, chaga is associated with intuition and wisdom, and it may be used in rituals to enhance psychic abilities and deepen meditation. It’s also associated with transformation (specifically with changing and letting go), inner peace, healing, vitality, and resilience.

Uses

Chaga is typically brewed as a tea, made into a tincture, or formulated as a powder or capsule. I like to brew my foraged chaga nuggets into a rich, brown, flavorful tea and combine it with warmed cream and maple syrup to make a decaffeinated chaga milk tea. It has a unique and delicious taste—earthy, full-flavored, creamy, and naturally sweet, with notes of vanilla, caramel, dark berries, and cocoa. You can drink it black, but I prefer adding warmed cream and local maple sugar, which complement chaga’s flavor nicely.

You can also burn chaga as a sweet-smelling incense. I reserve this for special occasions, as chaga is a somewhat rare, precious medicinal, and it can be a little pricey.



CHAGA MILK TEA RECIPE

- Four 1-to-1½-inch chunks of chaga, or pieces that add up to the equivalent
- 1 quart water
- Cream or milk of your choice
- Maple syrup or other sweetener
- Makes 1 serving

Place water and your nuggets of chaga in a small pot on a stove.

Bring to a boil; boil for 20 minutes.

Turn the heat down to low and simmer for 30 minutes. You'll notice the brew darkening as it simmers.

Turn off the stove and remove the chunks of chaga with a large spoon or tongs. The good news is you can get several uses from these chunks, so allow them to dry and use them again for your subsequent brews.

Pour yourself a mug of the tea.

Add cream or your desired type of milk. I like to heat the cream prior to adding it to my brew.

Sweeten to taste with maple syrup. Other sweetener options include honey or sugar, but maple syrup, in my opinion, complements the flavor best.

Most of the water will evaporate in the boiling and simmering process, so you'll be left with a large single portion or perhaps a small extra amount, depending on the size of your mug.

Important safety note: Chaga contains commonly occurring plant crystals called oxalates (as does spinach, for context), which can be harmful to the kidneys if ingested in large amounts. You can safely drink one to two cups of chaga tea a day, a few times a week.

Susan Ilka Tuttle is a bit of a hermit who enjoys living in the Maine woods. She's a wild herbalist, witch, practicing spirit medium, owner of the online shop In the Wood Botanicals, and author of Green Witch Magick. Visit her shop at inthewoodbotanicals.com and connect with her on Instagram @whisper_in_the_wood.



This elaborate mushroom headdress—or “weird hat” as Victoria DeMarco sometimes calls the wild pieces she conjures in her Atlanta home—is made from “a million things: thermoplastic, metal wiring, clay, pearls, lace, braided fabric, foam padding, yarn, beads, mother-of-pearl circles, paint, etc.” Because they’re monochromatic, the texture is really what comes into focus. Find Victoria DeMarco on Instagram @the_phaneron_fae.

Designer:
VICTORIA DEMARCO

Photography:
Eryn Price-Ormsby
of The Enchanted Wild
[@theenchantedwild](#)

Model: Julia Marvel
[@juullingo](#)



THE MUSHROOM GARDEN: THE ART OF ADAM OEHLERS by Carolyn Turgeon

The *Mushroom Garden* really has to be seen to be believed. British artist Adam Oehlers both wrote and illustrated the mesmerizing tome over the course of five years, creating a surreal yet highly detailed, fully imagined world of a mushroom garden through which a character known as the Girl moves—and sometimes is trapped—during the changing seasons. The garden shifts in epic fashion. The mushrooms shrink, grow, multiply, rise like boulders, and release spores that soar through the air and wrap around her. It’s like some kind of Wonderland (or Slumberland; I thought of Winsor McCay’s *Little Nemo* often as well), teeming with mushrooms of every kind. It’s all gorgeous and more than slightly mad—in the best possible way, of course.

I asked Oehlers how the idea for the book came to him, and he explained that when he and his wife (the artist Nom Kinnear King) lived in the Norfolk countryside, they’d often take long walks over Knettishall Heath. One afternoon they came upon a scene that struck a particular, magic chord: a tumble of fallen trees and branches covered entirely in a wide variety of mushrooms. “I remember feeling as though we’d stepped into a whole other world, a labyrinthine microcosm, and it utterly blew my mind,” he says. The experience inspired him to create

what was meant to be a one-off piece about a girl in a mushroom garden, but once he’d finished that, he could not let the idea go. He kept wondering about the Girl and what had called her to the garden. To answer those questions for himself, he created a second artwork, and he just kept going. Which is how books come to be.

Research helped with inspiration. Oehlers has always loved mushrooms—their come-hither looks, their connections to classic fairy tales and folklore—but when he began studying them, their wild names sent his imagination spinning. “The girdled knights,” he marvels, “the tawny grisettes, the deceivers, the funeral bells, the cavaliers ... All those names painted such incredible pictures for me. They gave these mushrooms their own individual purposes, and the characters and world just started to grow.” And it’s still growing. Since *The Mushroom Garden*’s release in 2021, Oehlers has been working on a second book that takes place in the same world, this time in the “wilder lands that surround the Mushroom Garden.” But of course he’ll return to the garden itself, and we’ll be there too, eager to step inside.



See more of Adam Oehlers’s work at [adamoeblersillustration.com](#) and find copies of *The Mushroom Garden* at [nomadicalley.bigcartel.com](#).





The Peahen by Adam Oehlers



FORAGER

by Andrea Eldridge

Mycologist calls it
Caloscypha fulgens
Did he sip from a
Dazzling golden cup
Hiding in detritus duff?

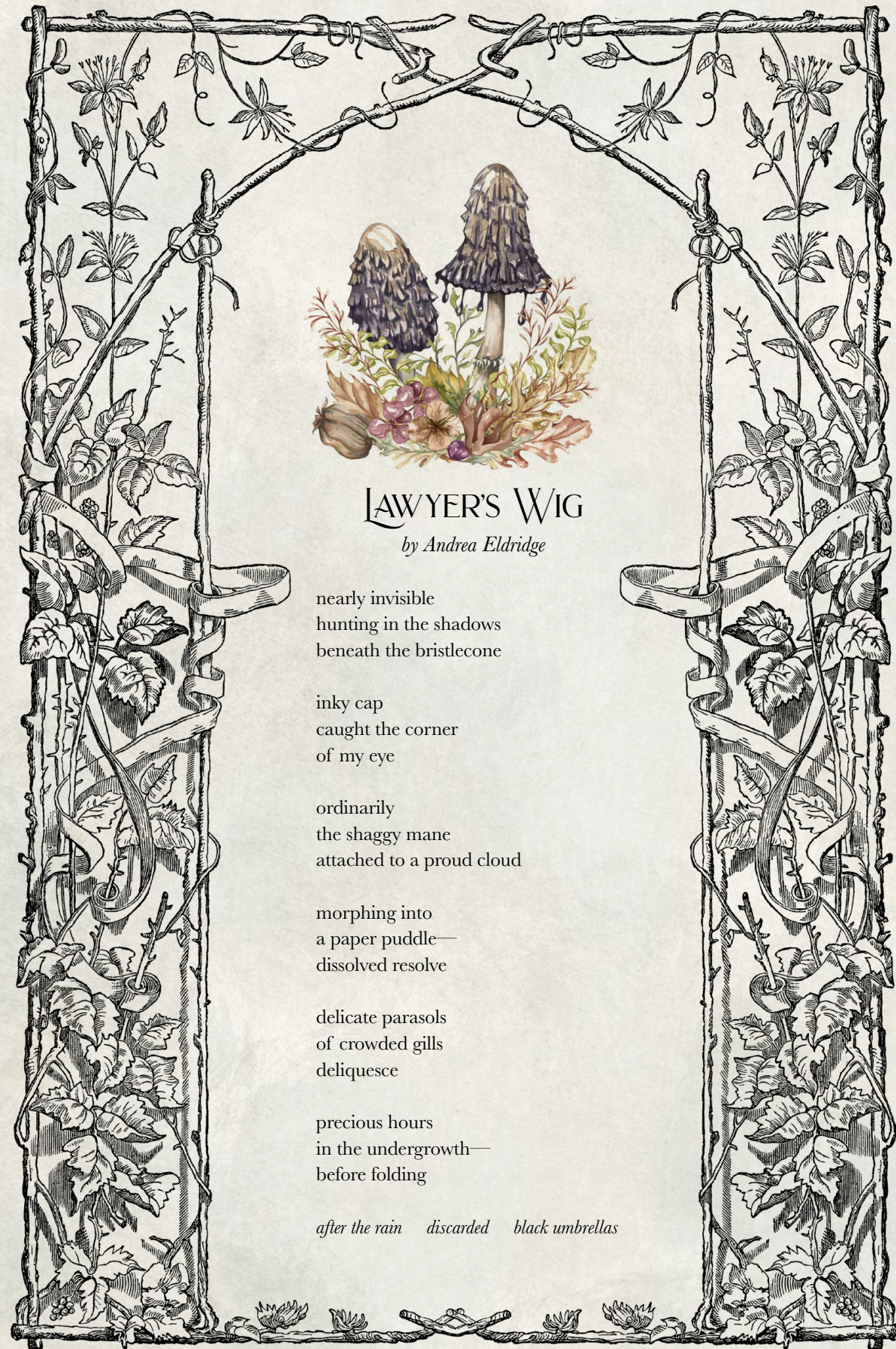
Blazing the color of a
Neon nightfall
Bellowing from the bog or
Beneath a fecund log
"I dare you to find me!"

Reach for rare air and
Set forth farther to
Pluck an organic
Original from Eden or
Chihuly's glass garden.

Our truffle hunter
Wielding his blade with
Microscopic precision
Protects the secret locale of
Another fluorescent kingdom.

seemingly insignificant spores

Art: *Collection de Documents d'Histoire Naturelle*, illustration by Claus Caspari. Ed Buziak / Alamy Stock Photo



LAWYER'S WIG

by Andrea Eldridge

nearly invisible
hunting in the shadows
beneath the bristlecone

inky cap
caught the corner
of my eye

ordinarily
the shaggy mane
attached to a proud cloud

morphing into
a paper puddle—
dissolved resolve

delicate parasols
of crowded gills
deliquesce

precious hours
in the undergrowth—
before folding

after the rain discarded black umbrellas

Photographer + Handmade Mushroom Hat:

JULIE FLORO

@julie_floro

Model: Leah Foster

@leahnaomifoster

Makeup: Anna Skavronsky

@anna_sky_beauty



Artist Julie Floro wanted to create an eco-friendly (and budget-friendly) DIY mushroom hat from materials she already had, so she fashioned the base shape from junk mail, turning it into papier-mâché and layering it over an old umbrella. Once it dried, she painted it and used spackling for the white dots. She made the underside out of pages from a recycled dictionary, which she folded accordion-style and hot-glued. She also hand-made the little mushrooms on the ground from clay that she hand-painted and dotted with spackling. See more of Julie's work at juliefloro.com.



Featured Artist

MURAVA CERAMICS

A fox curls up in the bowl of a spoon; a human face smiles mischievously from the handle. A ghost peers coyly around the stem of a martini glass. Or—our favorite—a long-stemmed amanita bends to form the handle of the happiest mug of soup you’ve ever held. Welcome to the ultra-whimsical, ultra-colorful, functionally creative world of ceramics artist Victoria Baba.

Born in Belarus and now living in Muğla, Turkey, she hand-builds and -glazes all manner of must-haves—mugs, spoons, wall hooks, earrings, cocktail glasses, and other forms of needful home décor the rest of us haven’t dreamed of yet.

She isn’t interested in standardized, completely utilitarian things, she says. She wants to create a whimsical, cozy world in which ordinary utensils bring joy—a world where “coffee is not just coffee; where a teaspoon is not only a spoon but also something from a fairy tale; where classic hooks become bunnies, birds, or mushrooms growing from the wall; and where classic mug handles become mushrooms, cows, or rabbits.”

She first fell in love with ceramics at Brest State Technical University, when, as an engineering student, she attended a workshop and was dazzled by the possibilities of clay, especially with colorful glazes. “I call myself a glaze maniac,” she says. “I want to buy and use all the glazes in world! I also like to concoct my own colors from powdered pigments and basic glazes.” Later, as a working engineer, she began a parallel life, taking private lessons from professional artists and learning everything she could about handling clay, making plaster molds, and firing in kilns. Eventually she started her own one-woman business, Murava Ceramics, which became so popular it now supports her full-time.

Her roots in Belarus are a clear source of inspiration. “It’s a country of forests and lakes,” she says. “And its aesthetic comes from the forest: animals, birds, mushrooms, berries.” She spent every childhood summer in her grandmother’s village house. They harvested blueberries, wild strawberries, and, of course, mushrooms. “I remember going deep into a wild forest, searching for berries and mushrooms. Grandma and I would call back and forth so as not to get lost. I’ll never forget those times.”

For her, the mushroom is a symbol of deep, wild forest, not to mention her most popular creation. “The forest will show you its deepest treasures,” she says, referring to those hidden clusters, “but only if it wants you to see them.”

Find Murava Ceramics at muravaceramics.etsy.com and on Instagram @murava_ceramics.



The Wild Box

BY CYNTHIA GRALLA

They'd been stuck at home for four weeks. It wasn't so different than before—she and Todd had always spent as much time together as they could.

“Lockdown will sort the real marriages from the marriages of convenience,” he declared. There was no question which group he expected them to sort into.

She wondered if some people might find their unions strengthened by intimacy but said nothing. It was easier not to object. She feared a fight, his temper flaring. Harmony requires restraint.

She read, he solved chess problems online, they watched movies, used the treadmill, cooked together. Mostly, she cooked; he chopped and cleaned. He got good at slicing garlic. They tried new recipes.

One day, he saw an ad online for something called the Wild Box.

“What's that?”

“A box of foraged, edible items, different each week, delivered to your door.”

“If they're foraged, they're overpriced.”

“Who cares? We're not spending much right now.” True—no eating out or weekend trips to be more alone with each other than they were Monday through Friday. “Let's try it.” She consented.

The first box, small enough for her to hold in two linked palms, contained chicken-of-the-wood mushrooms, squash blossoms, and a bouquet of wild peas, linden flowers, dame's rocket, and bedstraw. It looked like a bird-queen's funeral, a courtesan's hat, a collage Joseph Cornell would have crafted with requited love.

But there was something uncanny about the box. Even fully opened, the lid appeared to be opening further. Becoming unhinged.

“Do you see that?” she asked. She knew Todd would know what she meant.

“Yes. It's obscene.”

“Obscene means both abominable and sexually enticing.”

“Exactly.”

The Wild Box service delivered “weekly-ish,” so they had to wait nine days for the next one. Inside a cedarwood casket they found mustard flower, wood sorrel, nasturtium, amaranth seeds, henbit, and a trove of pheasant's eggs. It looked like maple leaves reddening in May, a ship slipping over the North Pole, an adult

sleeping in a child-size bed.

Halfway through preparing an omelet with the eggs, they forgot what they were doing and sat down to observe the box. This time, the lid was swelling, warping, bending all the way back to cup the bottom half.

Eight days later, they received the third box. Sea beans, morel mushrooms, rose hips, a vial of sassafras syrup, and a thimble's worth of pine nuts. It looked like hair growing after death, a river drowning, the instant hatred torches eyes.

The fourth box was larger than the others and made of a darker, lacquered wood. Its insides were broken into different compartments, a bento of wild berries, dandelion, stinging nettle, watercress, sea asparagus, and mountain sweet cicely.

This time, she and Todd just sat with the box as its segments merged. Blackberries bled green, and green streamed into dozens of colors. At the last, dandelions overran the chest.

A fortnight later, they heard a knock. That no one was there when they responded was normal in a time of no-contact deliveries. But the box placed carefully on their welcome mat seemed to greet them.

She brought it inside with shaking fingers and set it on the dining-room table. Todd lifted the lid. They caught their breath as one.

“Unbelievable,” she whispered.

The empty box thrummed. It looked like the maw of a beast, the revenge of myths.

The box opened until it was no longer a box. It was deconstructing itself, turning into space.

Watching it, she had the impression that she was inside it at the same time it was inside her.

That, she thought, might be the best definition of obscene.

She reached out to it. Todd gently slapped her hand away, like a parent. “No.”

Harmony requires restraint, but the box was opening her. She dove for it.

She was now everywhere and nowhere, but always within six cedar walls. At last, she was able to let loose a long, freeing cry. It produced chicken-of-the-wood mushrooms, pheasant's eggs, rose hips, stinging nettle, and other edibles that can only be foraged from the wild—the self and its delicious release.



“The Wild Box” was first published in The Antigonish Review's winter 2024 issue. Learn more about Cynthia Gralla at booksbycynthiagralla.com.

THE WORLD IS A FAIRY RING

by Kirsty Stonell Walker



*Medea the Sorceress (1880),
by Valentine Prinsep*

The house we lived in when I was a child had a storage cupboard outside the front door. Possibly inadvisably, my father grew mushrooms in there, making the cool, dark, tiled space smell earthy and magical. Outside, our modern home bordered a wood rich with puffballs, ink caps, and all manner of strangely named fungi.

I always knew that the mushrooms in the cupboard were safe, but it was best not to touch the ones in the wood. As a little girl, I did not understand why; I was too young to tell the poisonous from the delicious, so I rationalized that those mushrooms in the woods were homes to fairies or pixies and that it would have been rude, not to mention risky, to disturb them.

I was being unexpectedly Victorian in my reasoning, as the 19th century love of mushrooms was science tinged with fairy folk. The growing interest in vegetarianism in the latter half of the century celebrated the “meaty” delights of some of the larger specimens, while the button mushroom was a little gem to be added to stews.

And with more and more lady artists casting about and searching for suitable subjects for their still-life paintings, it seems unsurprising that they’d be attracted to the smooth white caps, velvet gills, and pops of color that marked the different varieties of fungi. And still-life pictures of nature were considered safe and appropriate.

Not only the mushrooms themselves but the genteel peasants who gathered them became the subject of works of art. In *The Mushroom Gatherers* (1878), James Clarke Hook showed a girl holding a wide basket full of fungi, her little brother on the ground in front of her pulling up a particularly large specimen. Similarly, in James J. Edgar’s *The Mushroom Gatherer* (c. 1860s), a beautiful young woman in modest working clothes sits beside her equally beautiful basket of shrooms, all pale and ripe like their collector.

These girls might have been particularly fond of foraging because of its perceived link to witchcraft. In Valentine Prinsep’s *Medea the Sorceress* (1880), the beautiful witch gathers red-tipped toadstools and places them in her basket, no doubt to fuel her craft rather than her breakfast. Of course she’s gathering the *Amanita muscaria*, or fly agaric, possibly the best known toadstool, renowned for its narcotic effect. For the Victorians, the red top with its white flecks symbolized positive magic as well as mischief and was even believed to have inspired the robes of Father Christmas (although I’m sure a certain cola company would have something to say about that). Broken into little pieces and soaked in milk, the fly agaric provided a powerful and irresistible poison to flies, and, when dried and swallowed whole, would inspire wild dancing and the spilling of secrets. The botanist Mordecai Cubitt Cooke published a ten-volume guide to British fungi and wrote extensively about hallucinogenic plants and the mind-altering effects of the fly agaric shroom. This stunner was also well-known as an antidote to nightshade poisoning, so Medea’s gathering might have been medicinal rather than murderous.

I’ve always wondered what the difference between a

mushroom and a toadstool was and the answer is *danger*. While there are stipulations that a toadstool has a stalk and a cap, we can all think of innocent white mushrooms that fit the definition but would never be called toadstools. During outbreaks of poisonings such as the epidemic in New York in 1893, the poisoning of the Marchant family in England in 1891, or the Andrieux family in Mureaux, France, in 1882, the perils of toadstools were always blamed. During the latter case, newspapers warned quite dramatically of “the danger of mistaking toadstools for mushrooms.” Quite honestly, all toadstools are mushrooms, but not all mushrooms are toadstools. The very word *toadstool* is a warning.

It also tells you there is something magical afoot. Do toads *need* to sit on stools? The toad in my garden needs to sit grumpily under my lavender bush and has never once expressed a desire for furniture.

Of course, where there are toads, other magical creatures usually abound. An interesting example is in John Anster Fitzgerald’s *The Intruder* (1865; pictured on page 38). The artist had such an obsession with the miniature magical world, he became known as Fairy Fitzgerald and was described by the London *Daily Chronicle* as “the well-known painter of hob-goblins, fairies, imaginative and classical subjects and portraits.” In *The Intruder*, wee fae folk confront a toad who wants to access his stool. The situation appears to have escalated fairly quickly with fairies of all sizes getting involved, yet the toad looks completely unbothered by it all—which is very brave because some of those little sprites look terrifying. More sensuous are the fairies of Thomas Heatherley (see page 71), their pink curvy bottoms and flaxen hair spilling over the white flesh of the mushroom cap. These are saucy fairies perched on pearly fungi, perfect and glittering, unconcerned with the matters of man. There are often accompanying pointy-hatted pixies, mind you, fighting with snails, which is enough to entertain anyone.

As a complete contrast, the fairy ring mushroom, *Marasmius oreades*, brings such positivity that poet Eliza Cook wrote a whole ode to its glory. Her poem contains the repeated refrain “For, while love is a fairy spirit, / The world is a fairy ring.” While the toadstool seems to shun human interaction and keep company with some very unpleasant types, the fairy ring of mushrooms invites the human in to meet the fae. In Edward Robert Hughes’s *Midsummer Eve* (c. 1905) a girl stands amid a full fairy ring and jamboree with lots of tiny fairy lights and naked fairies, as one does.

Little Victorian girls seem to have had a particular affinity with mushrooms, seen especially in Edward Atkinson Hornel’s works *The Little Mushroom Gatherers* (1902) and *Gathering Mushrooms* (1930) and Florence Small’s *The Mushroom Girl* (1886). These girls are dressed in picturesque rural attire, with spotless aprons and little baskets and not a dirty fingernail among them. I wonder if the link between young girls and mushrooms is that their innocence chimes with the fae sprites that find them. That’s why it seems perfectly natural that, in the 1917 case of the Cottingley Fairies, it was young Elsie Wright and Frances Griffiths who saw



Fairy Resting on a Mushroom (1860), by Thomas Heatherley

the fairies rather than their parents. If human interaction with fairies and their rings seems to cause trouble, then far more civilized is Walter Jenks Morgan’s *A Fairy Ring* (1870–80; pictured on page 5). Here we have a very demure circle of fairies, both male and female, fully dressed and listening politely to the fairy who’s speaking. Maybe it’s the presence of humans that makes fairies behave wildly—do *we* lead fairies astray? I always thought it was meant to be the other way around, but upon further reflection, we humans are a rum lot. Morgan’s fairies obviously conduct themselves in a democratic manner—dressed, neat, free of fighting or debauchery. The pale mushrooms reveal white gills beneath, giving the impression of purity, refinement, and goodness. These fairies and their mushrooms are positive forces in the world, but that world is not ours.

In the end, the problem with mushrooms may be that they’re not primarily made for humans. Mushrooms in all their guises are unexpectedly beautiful things, so it’s not surprising that people believed them capable of all manner of magic and, by

extension, mischief and malice. I was surprised to find that the fly agaric—arguably *the* archetypal forest mushroom—is in fact a rare sight in Britain’s woodlands. Its dangerous red coat announces that particular toadstool’s poison, unlike some of its more innocuous, pale cousins native to Britain’s woods. The destroying angel (*Amanita verna*) and death cap (*Amanita phalloides*) look very similar to the ones I have lined up for my risotto tonight, as it happens, all pearly white and innocent.

I ought to reassure you that as a sensible coward, I foraged mine from my local supermarket. The advice my parents gave me as a child was wise after all: Do not steal the fairy houses for your supper; you might not live long enough to have the leftovers for breakfast.



Kirsty Stonell Walker is a writer and researcher whose passion is bringing forward the stories of women who might have otherwise vanished in history. She’s the author of *Pre-Raphaelite Girl Gang and Light and Love and Stunner*, a biography of Pre-Raphaelite superstar Fanny Cornforth. Visit her on Instagram @kstonellwalker.



Wayward Traveler
by ANNIE STEGG
@anniestegg

HUNTING FOR THE HERBIVORE

by Andrea Eldridge

It's a lot of work for a transient trophy. Here in the mountains of Idaho, you can spend weeks tracking seasonal cues while tramping and sinking through the moist debris of dead and often uprooted trees without success. You trudge forward, increasing altitude day after day, until finally you spot clods of dirt just starting to break ... and there, pushing up through the moisture, it appears: The first morel. Your eyes take a minute to adjust to the shadows. I like to snap a picture of my quarry in its element as proof of life. But it's so unsightly—the mottled browns and grays unevenly pitted, blending into the forest floor.

What is the draw—why work so hard to harvest something with the complex scent of warm dirt? Mud will ruin your shoes, and branches scratch at your cheeks. There's hardly any rhyme or reason as to why we forage other than to savor this small piece of spring. Sure, morels can bring up to \$100 a pound, and cooks go crazy to get them. But most of us don't forage for the money. We savor the hunt.

They say that where there's one, there are more, and no hunter will divulge their personal sweet spots. Those spots are inconsistent anyway; if you come across a morel near the sound of creek song, you just might find the next in the silence of an alpine meadow. Morels hide under fallen logs, pine needles, and tall trees sometimes barely standing after thunderstorms. I'm told they prefer the charred remains of wildfire—and we've had plenty here in the wilderness—but those mushrooms tend to taste ashy.

Timing is an inexact science. The first morel doesn't always come at the end of May; it could be mid-June. It's entirely dependent upon Mother Nature: Will she shower us with raindrops or rays of sunshine? Either way, we must be patient. It's not until trilliums whisper and begin to blush that we even bother to take a knife and bag with us on the trail. I wish we could teach the dogs to sniff them out like truffles. Alas, it's not that easy. But none of it matters because you're always in the right place for *something* when standing on a mountainside.

Generally speaking, I'm not a mushroom forager; there are too many different kinds of fungi to master. I'm capable of focusing on only one at a time, so I've learned to identify and verify just morels. I need a single fix at the beginning of the season, for bragging rights. I can't rest until I slice one precious prize from its stem.



But there are dangers to a hunt—physical perils, ethical quandaries, unscrupulous rivals. You must beware of the morel's poisonous impostors, for one. As with villainous fairies and malicious spirits, there are always evil counterparts willing to deceive. A true morel is hollow inside, from the bottom of the stem to the top of the cap, but a false morel's stem is filled with cottony fiber and connected only to the top of the cap. A false morel will turn you off

mushrooms for life when you finish throwing up, kind of like tequila in Tijuana.

And don't let anyone tell you otherwise: Size matters. I can't pluck a morel the size of my pinky. I've got to pass it by and offer it as a gift to the next forager, who might come along when it's the size of a fist. I have at least the morals of a morel hunter. Besides, the little fungi need half a chance to grow and release their wind-whipped spores to make next year's crop.

Sadly, there are many commercial hunters out there, even on private property, who don't have the same scruples. They'll park on the side of the forest service roads and work their way uphill, gathering grocery bags full of *my* morels for resale. The dogs and I must resort to the less trafficked trails known only to locals.

Once I've brought my prizes home in triumph, I make sure that they don't go to waste. I'm not so much about cooking them myself, although I will order them in a steak or pasta sauce off the menu. I'm no chef; in fact, I don't like to cook at all if I can help it. The morels I keep will likely be baked atop pizza or scrambled in eggs—these simple uses will suffice, as they stretch the extent of my cooking skills.

It's important to take good care of one's haul, which after all is a precious investment. First I swirl my catch in a warm saltwater bath to get the creepy-crawlies out; then I lay them out to dry on the porch railing. I'll give some away to friends who can find their way around a kitchen but cannot navigate a labyrinth of trails. Maybe I'll even lead them to stumble directly upon a secret stash. They too should have an opportunity to experience the treasures of the forest as well as thrill of the hunt.

Art: *Morchella esculenta* illustrated by Anna Maria Hussey (1805–1853)



Andrea Eldridge is a Pushcart Prize-nominated and anthologized poet and a recent winner of the United Haiku and Tanka Society's international Samurai Haibun Contest.

SPRING PLAYFULNESS: BLACK FAE DAY

by *Jasmine La Fleur*

Photograph by *Aurie Singletary of Clique Creative*

It's a bit of an understatement to say that adjusting to life after the pandemic—or as I like to call it, the Great Pause—was challenging. For some, the healing balm came in the form of a hashtag, #blackfaeday. In May 2021, I called for Black fantasy enthusiasts all over social media to don fantasy garb and celebrate themselves for a day of positivity and merriment. Since then, Black Fae Day has been celebrated globally, online and in person, on the second Saturday of May each year.

Black Fae Day is all about connecting through playful experiences—and as it turns out, playing is good for you! I recently spoke about this subject with Dr. Niah W. Dickson Singletary, a.k.a. Phoenix Luxe. A self-proclaimed TheraFairy who cosplays, she has written on the mental and psychological benefits of creativity and play for Black adults. She shared her unique perspective as a fantasy nerd and mental health therapist.

“Organizations and holidays like Black Fae Day,” Luxe told me, “teach the world what Black people have always known: Radical joy and play are healing. Fantasy is limitless and allows for expression that doesn’t focus on revisiting trauma of our everyday lives.”

When I asked her what advice she’d give people who feel alienated and without community—and who want to experience more joy through play—she responded, “For every interest, there are people ready to welcome you ... people that can show you all the ways joy is real ... Sometimes it starts with something as simple as frolicking in a park among kin.”

And that we do. Black Fae Day is an intergenerational affair that inspires lasting smiles to heal weary hearts. Whole families participate, from grandparents to the youngest infant. Children cavort in miniature wings, capes, and face paint. Their parents wear festive costumes as well. Humble gatherings in homes and parks are the most magical and popular ways to celebrate, but if you’re ambitious like me, you might quite literally have a ball.

Since the inaugural jubilee, I’ve had the pleasure of hosting two Fairytale Galas and a global Faemily Reunion. People from all backgrounds and walks of life have collaborated to make



each celebration more jovial than the last. Connections as deep and rich as mycelium forests have been created through the power of kindness and imagination. And yes: I too credit the unstoppable power of the playfulness in all of us. It’s an intimate and ancient feeling that can be experienced only by inviting others in.

This spring, I encourage every reader to slay feelings of bashfulness and invite someone new into your play circle. The overture can be as simple as sharing a welcoming smile or sending out an invitation for second breakfast. Remember that your playfulness is liberating—not only for yourself but for the people around you. Joy is the bridge that connects all hearts and minds.

When you’re ready to roll down hills and Swag Surf in castles, I’ll

be waiting. To see what’s happening in your neck of the woods or to participate in this Black Fae Day, please follow the official Instagram @blackfaedayofficial for updates. Like last year’s, the next Faemily Reunion will include several event and community organizers from around the world.

Phoenix Luxe Recommends

To hear more about the incredible research mentioned here, reach out to Dr. Singletary via her Instagram handle: @blderdylove. Also, aside from Black Fae Day, Luxe loves communities like Carefree Black Girl (@carefreeblackgirlinc) and Black Joy x Reckon (@blackjoyreckon). For further reading, she recommends Dr. Jearold Winston Holland’s *Black Recreation: A Historical Perspective*; *Why Wakanda Matters: What Black Panther Reveals About Psychology, Identity, and Communication*, edited by Dr. Sheena C. Howard; and Dr. Samuel T. Gladding’s *Creative Arts in Counseling*.



Jasmine La Fleur is a proud library worker and self-proclaimed LiFAERian in Jacksonville, Florida. When she isn’t frolicking with local fairies she enjoys reviewing books on the Nymphs of Lore Podcast.

Follow Clique Creative on Instagram @clique_creative_atl.



THE PAPER
MUSHROOMS OF
ANN WOOD,
A.K.A. WOODLUCKER



In the last days of his life, Ann Wood's father was thinking about plants. "He was looking at a sumac tree," she says, "and he started describing how beautiful it was. I just thought, Wow, he's talking about plants. We could be discussing all kinds of things, but he's talking about plants." It struck her as both interesting and heartbreaking at the same time—and "like maybe there is a key to the universal here."

She'd been working as a mixed-media artist for decades by then, after growing up on her parents' Iowa farm and later graduating from the Minneapolis College of Art and Design. That was where she met her husband, and the two of them set up a fine craft business together while maintaining their own separate bodies of work. Suffering the loss of her father made her re-evaluate her direction. She wanted to make art that was personal to her—and through the personal, tap into the universal.

She'd also just joined Instagram, where she discovered artists working in paper to make botanical sculptures. They inspired her to go back to her roots, both literally and metaphorically. She wanted to make something primal, and she loved the idea of using paper, which can be manipulated to produce all sorts of amazing effects. She started by creating a simple feather, and ended up making a whole collection of feathers. And then came butterflies, and flowers, and paper food, and mushrooms, and birds.

There was an immediacy to this new medium that she liked. She was used to working on a piece for six months or longer; now she was creating quickly, putting her pieces on social media, and getting instant feedback. It was a new way of working in and within a community, reaching people anywhere in the world. It turned out to be just what she needed to progress as an artist and work through her grief.

When people look at her work, they're astonished—first at the lush effect and minute details, then at what goes into it. People often marvel: "That's paper? You can do that with paper." That's where she's hoping to go, Wood says.

Her technique represents her subjects at the peak of their beauty. Flowers and mushrooms have their moment of voluptuousness and then decay, and for her, "it's about capturing that moment ... holding onto it and trying to understand it."

Mushrooms are especially ephemeral, she says, because they appear so suddenly, then disappear just as fast. Within twenty-four hours they might reach their peak beauty and then melt away. To really capture a fungus, then, she has to study it in all its fleeting specificity. "I've made a lot of mushrooms that have gills on the underside," she says. "That's the part that most feels related to flowers in form, beauty, and delicacy."

Each plant or fungus is shaped and marked by its own life story, an individuality she calls randomness. That's one of the issues in making this art, she says: "That randomness is extremely hard to achieve. And most things are random. They're not perfectly symmetrical. A young mushroom can be pristine white, or at a different stage, it might have some stain on it, or maybe something's taken a bite out of it. To me, nature's

beauty is about that randomness." The imperfections create personalities, and we get the sense that Wood knows each one of her subjects intimately: "Every single thing that grows in nature is unique. Every flower shape is unique. I would have never known that if I hadn't studied plants and fungi so closely."

Wood's process is complex and painstaking. "The really fun part for me," she says, "is coming up with the ways to create texture and color." She estimates that she uses twenty to thirty different types of paper regularly—"some of it's thick, some of it's cardboard, some of it's super-thin and transparent." The paper itself might be ripped, cut, sliced, diced, or rolled up into a little ball; she could sand, press, or hammer it to get just the effect she needs.

Color and luminosity are key concerns. White paper can look either heavy and solid or light and thin. For example, applying a coat of white glue makes her mushrooms translucent. She paints the paper to match the colors that the mushroom (or flower or any other subject) would be in real life. Thick paint and different finishes give more texture, making a piece glossy or shiny. She also uses colored pencils, gouache, and acrylic. One mushroom, for example, might require twenty different colors, twenty different tones, with maybe five variations of red in it.

While paper might be the beginning medium, Wood stays true to her roots as a mixed-media artist, which means she might (for example) throw dust on wet paint to create an effect. "My whole thing really is about exploring different techniques that I invent along the way to have paper translate into the real thing," she says. She'll incorporate whatever it takes to create the right texture—even some rather bizarre materials. "I was pulling lint out of the dryer one day," she says, "and I realized that it looked like the top of one of the mushrooms I was working on. I thought, *What if it was rolled into little balls?* I've used spices for the pollen on flowers, like paprika—it works for pollen on a lily. The whole world becomes a source of materials."

Wood now has a steady stream of inspiration—and challenges. She follows several mushroom foragers' accounts, has a library of field guides and art books, and is always astonished at discovering new varieties she's never seen before. Right now, she says, she's working on some tiny mushrooms with caps the sizes of stud nails, which will cover a three-inch piece of bark covered in moss. She's figuring out how to get up inside to make the gills.

That kind of challenge keeps her work constantly expanding. How will she make the moss? How will she get it to look just the right amount of random? How can she convey a mushroom's personality, so that when someone looks at a piece, they stop and say, "Wow, that's really cool"?

She might not have all the answers right away, but we can give her one right now: She will do it all with the ingenuity, grace, and sheer amazing creativity that keep us marveling at both the natural world and the power of art.



See more of Ann Wood's work at woodlucker.com and follow her on Instagram at [@woodlucker](https://www.instagram.com/woodlucker).



“Every single thing that grows in nature is unique. Every flower shape is unique. I would have never known that if I hadn’t studied plants and fungi so closely.” —Ann Wood

TALES OF THE SINISTER, LIMINAL MUSHROOM

by Sara Cleto and Brittany Warman

“The dead don’t walk. Except, sometimes, when they do.” —T. Kingfisher, *What Moves the Dead*

In recent years, mushrooms have appeared in some very particular realms of speculative literature—horror and the Gothic. It turns out that mushrooms are the perfect vehicle for scary stories. Part of it is their sheer liminality. Despite all of our scientific advancements, we still don’t really understand them. They’re not exactly flora, not exactly fauna, but something entirely different—something that resists categorization.

What cannot be put into tidy boxes quickly becomes fodder for tales of horror. In high-theoretical terms, monsters frighten us because of their “hybridity”—they aren’t quite one thing or another, and the ambiguity is deeply unsettling. This is easy to see with classical monsters like Medusa or Scylla, whose beautiful human bodies are transformed by the addition of snakes or extra heads. Now hybrid composites, they are no longer entirely human, but they’re not animals either. They’ve become monstrous.

Mushrooms, which never fit into a neat category to begin with, are very ready to be made monstrous.

One of our favorite books that explore the sinister potential of the mushroom is T. Kingfisher’s *What Moves the Dead*, a 2022 retelling of Edgar Allan Poe’s short story “The Fall of the House of Usher.” As in Poe’s story, the narrator (here named Alex Easton) arrives at the home of their friend Roderick Usher and his sister, Madeline, only to see that the house is falling into ruin. Something is very wrong: While the reason for Madeline’s illness and the house’s decline is never made explicit in Poe’s story, Kingfisher places the blame squarely on the parasitic mushrooms that thrive in the unwholesome landscape. These are mushrooms that can literally move the dead, and when Madeline dies, she’s also reanimated by their power. Remember what we said about hybridity and monstrosity? Madeline becomes part woman, part corpse, mostly mushroom. Eat your heart out, Medusa.

Sylvia Moreno-Garcia’s superb 2020 novel, *Mexican Gothic*, takes the idea of mushroom-based life extension even further. Like *What Moves the Dead*, the story begins with our protagonist visiting an old Gothic home and finding it overrun with problematic mushrooms. Noemí, the book’s heroine, goes to check on her cousin Catalina, who has married into the English Doyle family. Noemí quickly realizes that their mansion is

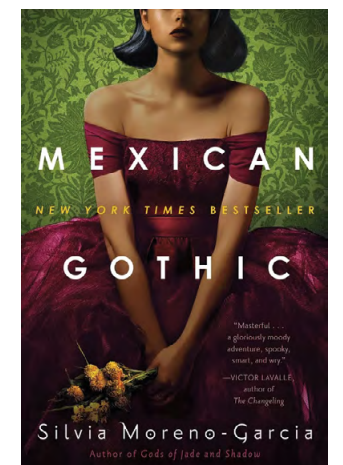
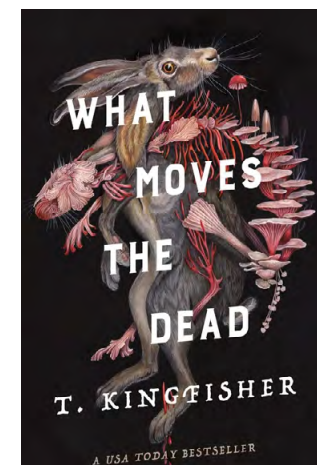
overtaken with mold, fungus, and rot, which disgusts her but seems to be weirdly acceptable to the Doyles.

It turns out that the house’s mushrooms have developed a symbiotic but decidedly sinister relationship with the Doyle family. They offer healing properties, but they also seem to sap something vital from the people who dwell in the house. Eventually, Noemí discovers that the family patriarch, Howard, uses the fungus to grant him an incredibly long life. But what’s much worse is that the mushrooms also grant him dominance and power over all his family members. He has learned to literally take over the consciousnesses and bodies of younger family members through the mushrooms’ power.

So once more, a human fused with mushrooms proves to be bad news. Like the oppressive colonial powers in Mexico to which the Doyle mushrooms are deliberately alluding, it seems like an impossible situation, but Noemí’s solution is both satisfyingly dramatic and extremely warranted.

If you want to explore more sinister mushroom tales, other books that feature them include Stephen King’s *Dreamcatcher* (2001), *Creatures of Want and Ruin* by Maggie Tanzer (2018), *Agents of Dreamland* by Caitlín R. Kiernan (2017), and a collection of short stories entitled *Fungi* (2012), edited by Orrin Grey and Moreno-Garcia.

But be warned: After reading any of the books mentioned in this article, we doubt you’ll be able to look at a seemingly innocent portobello the same way again.



Sara Cleto and Brittany Warman are folklorists, authors, and teachers, as well as co-founders of The Carterhaugh School of Folklore and the Fantastic, which you can read more about at carterhaughschool.com.



VERONICA VARLOW

Life of a Love Witch

I was a fifteen-year-old goth girl living in a tiny Florida town, one filled with the ghosts of strip malls, discarded dreams, and fast-food joints. All I wanted was to get out—until she arrived. She glided through the halls of our cinderblock high school with a ballerina’s grace. Her long hair spilled down her shoulders as if she were Botticelli’s Venus. She adorned herself in antique lace Victorian dresses that flowed like fairy tales in her wake. She possessed an otherworldly mystique, something supernatural and lovely, the likes of which my small town had never seen. Her name was Cynthia.

Our instant friendship was a glorious life raft on the tumultuous ocean of our teenage years. We devoured the novels of Anne Rice and the diaries of Anaïs Nin. We scrawled the lyrics of songs by the Cure, the Sisters of Mercy, and Depeche Mode in black markers across the covers of our notebooks. We scoured thrift stores for vintage slips, silk scarves, and 1940s veils in various stages of deterioration. On school property, we cast spells using a dog-eared paperback book of magic that had the cover ripped off. We crafted an elaborate forest world that we’d visualize at the same time every morning to give us strength for the day. That daily escape to an alternative world of gentle violet rain, soft moss, willow trees, and endless beautiful dresses saved my life in high school.

The reason I’m telling you all this is because we would religiously visualize a world we wanted to manifest rather than *languish in the one we were in*. We were teenage world builders who loved to envision our future published books, the thought-provoking articles we’d write in magazines, and the wild, art-filled lives we’d have as authors.

And would you believe, Dear Reader,

that the Cynthia I’m gushing about is the very same Cynthia Gralla whose story you’ll find on page 68 of this publication? And that *that* came about by pure coincidence, by magic? I had no idea that she’d be in this issue until she mentioned it to me via email, and it turns out that *she* was invited to be in this issue only when contributor Susann Cokal showed Carolyn Turgeon, *Enchanted Living*’s editor in chief, Cynthia’s Substack, where she’d shared some of her mushroom writings. I could not believe it. It’s what we’d envisioned for ourselves when we were teenagers, and now here we are.

Words are wands. Our visions are spells. And the good news is that Cynthia and I continue to use our powers of manifestation to bend this world to our will. Let me show you how ...

Here are our three teenage (and now luscious queen-age) secrets to building your own world:

Step 1: Choose Your Own Adventure: Create Your Crystal Visions

Do you remember the Choose Your Own Adventure books? In every book, you were given decisions to make choices that would lead to a possibility of forty different endings.

Confession: I cheated every time. I’d flip through the book to find the most juicy, incredible ending and then I’d work backward to see which choices I needed to make to ensure that I’d get to my dream ending.

The way I manifest is just like that. Start at the ending and work your way backward!

Just like Mother Stevie Nicks sings about her “crystal visions,” it’s time for us to create our very own clear and focused visions. Visioning is just like going on a journey. You have to put the final destination in the GPS so that you know

how to get there.

To create your crystal visions, begin by closing your eyes and asking yourself, “*What would I like my life to look like one year from today?*”

You’re the hero of the story. Give yourself permission to indulge your juiciest imagination.

Your passion is your superpower. Spells begin to cast themselves when you start to feel very real emotions running through you as you imagine your vision. If you don’t get goosebumps or feel your heart beat faster, then there’s something even greater for you to imagine. Keep visualizing until you land on the thing that makes your heart soar.

Details make it real. What are you wearing in the vision? Where is your location? Look around and notice all the aspects of the space.

Before I even had a deal for my book *Bohemian Magick*, I knew that I wanted to write something about my grandma and our lineage witchcraft. I began to visualize writing at my desk, but I didn’t get that goosebump excitement rush. So I jumped ahead to the good part! I imagined myself at the Strand bookstore, sitting at the featured author’s table with a crowd of people lined up to get my beautiful hardcover book.

Bam! Goosebumps appeared. My heart began to race. *I wanted this.*

Three years later, it happened. I sat in the famed author’s chair at the Strand and had a line of people waiting to buy *Bohemian Magick*.

Hot tip: Remember that your emotions are the powerful fuel to manifest your vision into reality!

Step 2: Create an Alter Ego (and Get Ready to Take Bold Action)

Manifesting our dreams can be

a daunting and terrifying task, but creating an alter ego to start doing the tasks to make your dream come true will help. An alter ego is a genuine version of you that perhaps you’ve been afraid to express fully before. Through the process of naming and creating this alter ego, you allow yourself permission to become bolder.

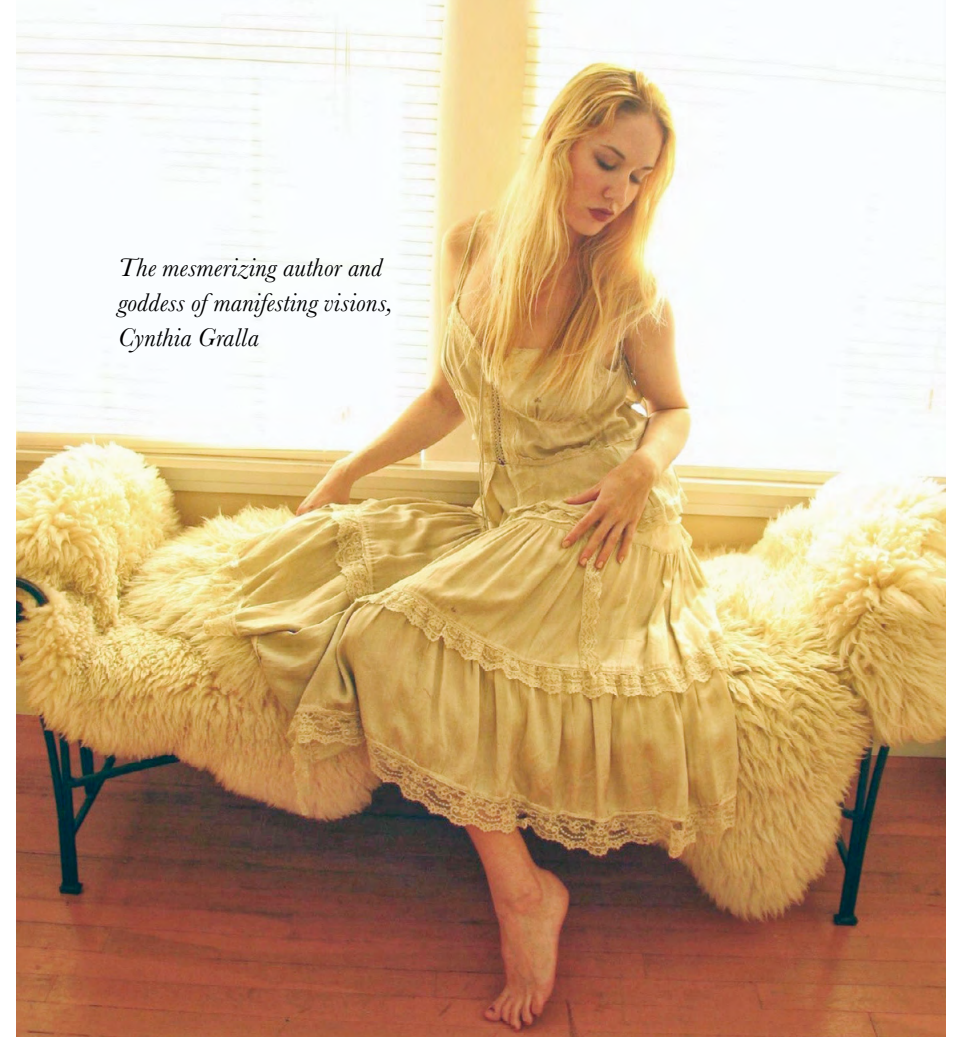
Craft your alter ego to align with the energy of who you need to be to achieve your goals.

For instance, when I first saw burlesque, I was enthralled. I wanted to do it so badly, but I also knew that it would be an insane leap in my comfort level to even attempt it. Still, I knew that there was something in my soul, some aspect of me, that was deeply drawn to getting on stage and dancing with feather fans, gorgeous gowns, and elegant underthings. So I gave a name to that very real part of myself. I named her Veronica.

My birth name is Tara Lee, and as Tara Lee, I knew I was deeply ashamed of my sensuality. From the ages of thirteen to eighteen, I grew up in a household of men, and I hid the feminine aspects of me to fit in. So as an adult wanting to do burlesque, I gave myself permission to indulge in my fullest feminine expression as I crafted Veronica in my mind. I imagined her to be a confident, sultry, vintage-styled femme fatale. She was the superheroine version of me. I coaxed Veronica out of me, little by little, and took bold steps toward my dream of burlesque.

The night of my first stage show, I was absolutely terrified. I said to myself, “It’s okay that Tara Lee is afraid, but Veronica is fearless and steering this ship. The burlesque stage is her *realm*. She is confident and in charge everywhere she goes. She bends this world to her *will!*” Strangely enough, as I said those words, I found myself standing up taller and allowing Veronica to take over. Turns out, she is fearless! She took me on world tours for a decade and is still nudging fire palms and feather fans into my hands.

Hot tip: What part of you needs to be encouraged and nourished so that you can manifest your dream vision? Start



The mesmerizing author and goddess of manifesting visions, Cynthia Gralla

building your alter ego from that loving, nurturing place.

Step 3: Craft Your Crystal Visions Board

If you’re reading this magazine, chances are you’re a visual person. You love lush, beautiful images that straddle the worlds of fantasy and reality. Our brains subliminally take in information, and the images and words we see repeatedly have the best chance of sticking in our minds.

Create your own crystal-visions board.

- **You’re the main character of your crystal-visions board.** Start by printing out your favorite photo of yourself and putting it in the middle of the board. You’ll accelerate your success if you see yourself surrounded with the manifestations you desire.
- **Cut out pictures from magazines and secondhand art books, and print out photos that align with what you want.** Fact: My favorite photos are from *Enchanted Living*! I back-

ordered the entire collection before I had a column, and I surrounded my crystal-visions board with beauty!

- **Place your board where you can see it all the time.** My board is above my writing space, so if I’m feeling stuck, I can look up and see the crystal visions I’ve created for myself! Alternatively, you can create your crystal-visions board digitally and put it on your lock screen on your phone or computer.

I’m sending you all the imagination, wonder, boldness, and sizzling courage to craft this gorgeous story of your life! Who knows? We might end up together in a future issue of *Enchanted Living*!



Veronica Varlow’s best-selling book, Bohemian Magick, is now available everywhere—packed with secret spells and rituals passed down from Grandma Helen. Read more about it, as well as about her Witch Camp and Love Witch Tarot School, on lovewitch.com. Find Veronica on Instagram @veronicavarlow.



A capture of wild *Amanita muscaria* in rural Wales by artist Aimée Cornwell. Visit her online on Instagram @peggyfarmandforage and @aimeecornwelltattoo.

MUSHROOM MAIDENS

by Miss Wondersmith

Photography by Cristin Hinze-Heart



choose a drizzly day in the gloaming to wander through the emerald cathedrals of the Cascadian coastal rainforest. I love days in the rain—something about the soft filtered light just brings all the colors of the woods to life! Today I feel as giddy as I used to on Easter morning, envisioning colorful candy eggs waiting to be found.

Every walk in the woods feels like a treasure hunt to me. Will I find a cluster of golden chanterelles, redolent with their apricot perfume? Will I stumble across a fairy circle of amanita mushrooms, their scarlet spotted caps reminding me to tread carefully? Maybe I'll walk over the crest of the hill to see a bunch of delightfully chubby porcini scattered below ...

Not today. Today something truly magnificent is waiting for me. I'm on hands and knees, softly crawling through the moss up the steep slope, when right in front of my nose appears the empress of the woods. There she stands in her amethyst glory, covered in velvety purple so dark it almost appears to be black. In all my time in these glorious woods, I've never been in the presence of any sort of violet webcap before. The moment feels transcendent, and I get a twinkling sense of a thinning of the veil. I can feel the magic here. Of course I can.

There's something about mushrooms that casts a spell of enchantment. Flowers are lovely and I would never slight the smell of a wild rose, but they're all sweetness. Mushrooms, on the other hand, are tricksters. They're unpredictable and elusive,

alien and strange. And don't we all love a chase? I lie down in the moss and imagine that I'm a mushroom myself, sending invisible tendrils of mycelium down into the earth below me. I let myself melt into the moss, let the forest consume me in my soft bed.

Soon I see fae creatures dancing, each one bearing a resemblance to a particular mushroom.

Their faces are obscured, but their movements are unmistakable. The chanterelle queen is elegant and just a bit flirtatious. The porcini fae is shy but lovely. The mysterious ink cap elf looks up slyly, inviting me to join a realm I daren't wander into. Then the Empress of the Forest arrives in her violet velvet, and all the fae hush in awe at her grandeur.

When I wake, I wonder

if it was a dream, a daydream, or something else entirely. The violet webcap still stands nearby,

inconspicuous. I give her a wink as I stand up, my heart bright with magic and my mind

swirling with inspiration ...

A year later I watch those dreams come to life with a group of incredible magical women from all over the country, drawn as I am to the mycelial magic of the coastal rainforest. Read more about this magical gathering and find everything you need to host your own at patreon.com/misswondersmith. There are a few things you'll definitely want to include, the first of which is a crown for every participant. Keep reading to learn how to make an amanita one!



MAKE AN AMANITA CROWN

Etraight out of a fairy tale, a crown of bright amanitas will make you feel royal indeed. For this stunner, you'll need at least 15 mushrooms; it will look most enchanting if you use a variety of sizes, ranging from about 6 inches all the way down to 2 inches tall.

These forest gems are surprisingly easy to sculpt, especially when using Model Magic clay, which is both lightweight and malleable. Clay amanitas are also just great to have on hand for other projects. Even if you simply insert hooks to hang them as ornaments, they'll add magic and whimsy to your life!

SCULPTED AMANITAS

You'll need:

- *Model Magic clay (this lightweight foam clay makes mushrooms that aren't too heavy!)*
- *Bamboo skewers*
- *Something to stand the skewers in, like a piece of Styrofoam*
- *Satin Mod Podge*
- *PVA glue (a white glue like Elmer's or Aileen's)*
- *Acrylic paint and brushes*
- *Scraps of fine cotton fabric*
- *Glossy dimensional fabric paint (white)*
- *Epoxy or hot glue and a glue gun*

Directions:

1. Take two pieces of clay, one about half the size of the other, and roll them both into smooth balls between your palms. Pinch the smaller ball into a slightly tapered cylinder so that one end is a little bit more bulbous than the other, then insert a bamboo skewer up through the center, letting it come out from the top a quarter inch. Smooth out the stalk if needed, and pinch it to become a little bit taller if desired. Then stick the bottom end into the Styrofoam (or something else that will hold it stable while it dries).

2. To make the cap, flatten the larger ball on a smooth surface to create a domed cap. While holding it gently in your hand with the flat side up, use a knife to cut four lines into it in the formation of a cross. Then cut four more lines to make an "X." This will help to keep your gills spaced evenly. Carefully cut more lines in between the existing ones until they look like the gills of a mushroom. Place flat-side-down on a piece of parchment paper and leave to dry.

3. Optional: Take a small amount of the Model Magic clay and pinch it as

thinly as you can without going through. (It's fine if there are a few holes.) This will be used in making dimensional spots. Leave to dry.

4. Once the components are totally dry, you can add some details. To create the illusion of layers at the base of the mushroom, rip the thin cotton fabric into half-inch strips, then dip them into a 50/50 mixture of Mod Podge and water. Run the strip between your fingers to remove excess liquid, then wind it around the base of a mushroom, overlapping each layer by about half.

5. To add a frill around the stalk (a.k.a. the mushroom's skirt), roll a snake out of Model Magic that's just over a quarter inch thick, then wrap it around the stalk about a third of the way down from the top. Use your finger and a bit of water to blend the top of the skirt into the stalk and then pinch the wrap into a thin membrane. Arrange it so that it has some flare and an uneven bottom, then leave to dry.

6. To paint the mushroom cap, mix some red acrylic paint with just a touch of brown to create a realistic color. Then paint the caps of all the mushrooms, making sure to create a nice line at the base of the caps where the gills begin so that no paint goes onto the gills at all.

7. Once the first coat has dried, you can add more dimension by making the center of the cap a darker red and the

edges a lighter red-orange, then blending them together.

8. After the paint dries, glue the caps to the stalks using epoxy or hot glue. Then it's time to add the spots. You have a couple of options here. You can tear the thin, dried foam clay into bits and glue them on, which creates a very realistic look. Or you can just use some more dimensional fabric paint, which I prefer because it's much less time consuming and still looks realistic. As you apply your spots, you want to keep them irregular—textured and splotchy. In nature, the spots in the middle are often a little bigger than the ones on the edges. Let dry completely.

9. To add texture and dimension to your amanita, create a wash using dark brown paint, Mod Podge, and a little water (1 part paint, 1 part Mod Podge, 2 parts water, until you have the consistency of skim milk). Then paint the wash on the gills of the mushroom, on the cap, and on the stalk and the base. Working quickly, use a damp rag or wet wipe to clean off the excess, leaving color only in the recessed areas. This will bring out the texture without changing the overall color much. Let dry completely.

10. Use a dry brush to stipple on light chartreuse green and darker green to look like moss at the base of the amanita, then paint a layer of Mod Podge over the caps and a layer on the gills and stalk.



PUTTING THE CROWN TOGETHER

You'll need:

- *Thick wire (like tie wire)*
- *Wire cutters*
- *Green floral wrap*
- *Green felt, cut into small circles*
- *Your 15 amanitas in varying sizes*
- *Preserved moss*
- *Hot glue gun and glue sticks*
- *Nonstick work surface like parchment paper*





Amanita Crown
(shown here with faux flowers added)

1. If your amanitas still have skewers sticking out of the bottoms of the stalks, use strong scissors or a wire cutter to trim them off right at the base.
2. Create a loop of thick wire that fits comfortably around your head and then twist the ends together. Recheck the fit: Slightly large is better than tight. Cut another piece of wire about three-quarters as long as the first piece and add it to the front, overlapping by about 2 inches at the widest part. Wrap the ends around the original frame to attach. Entwine the entire thing in green floral wrap.
3. When you add the outer wire it'll make the shape of a crescent moon. Lift the center of the outer wire up about 2 inches. This will provide a framework for the mushrooms so that when the crown is worn, they stand vertically.
4. Working carefully but quickly (so the

- glue doesn't cool down before you finish), apply a little hot glue to the bottom of the tallest amanita and press it against the middle of the front of the crown. Stick a piece of green felt over the wire and against the mushroom on either side to hold it firmly in place.
5. Add another dab of hot glue to the mushroom where it crosses over the upper wire. Press it in and add another piece of felt to hold it in place.
6. Repeat this process on either side of the tallest amanita, going from tall to short, until you've filled out the crown with seven of them.
7. Now add the rest of the mushrooms to the front, using hot glue to attach them to the stalks of the taller amanitas. I like to vary the height slightly in the front to give a more organic appearance.
8. Once all the mushrooms have been

- glued in place, fill in any open gaps with moss. Also glue a line of moss to the bottom of all the mushrooms.*
9. Cover the back of the crown with moss and fill in any gaps.
10. Clean up any hot glue strings.

Your crown is ready to wear! If it's a little too big, use some pliers to make a crimp in the back to tighten it.

* Once you've positioned the mushrooms and moss in Step 8, you can personalize your crown further by adding faux flowers, rhinestones, and other baubles. Follow your heart and let the magic sweep you away!

For full tutorials for each mushroom crown pictured at this party, and for more delightful information about the gathering, visit patreon.com/misswondersmith.



“Every walk in the woods feels like a treasure hunt to me. Will I find a cluster of golden chanterelles, redolent with their apricot perfume? Will I stumble across a fairy circle of amanita mushrooms, their scarlet spotted caps reminding me to tread carefully?”

Photography:
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Model: Zuzana Opluštilová
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Things We Love

Spring 2025



A FAMILIAR'S SECOND CHANCE

by Monica Crosson

It was spring, the season of green fire that enveloped the hillside and gentle breezes that carried the scent of wildflowers and fresh rain. It was in this vibrant season of renewal that the young witch first felt the pull of the mushroom amulet. She wore it on a leather cord around her neck, a gift from her grandmother, a powerful witch whose wisdom wove through every fiber of the girl's life, much like the forest roots that wound unseen beneath her feet.

"This will guide you when the time is right," her grandmother had whispered, pressing the talisman into her palm. At the time, the girl hadn't understood her grandmother's words, but on that day, the amulet felt warm against her chest, thrumming with a gentle, insistent energy.

The girl had been longing for a familiar. Every witch she knew had one: a creature imbued with magic, not just a companion but a kindred soul, a reflection of the witch herself. She imagined a sleek black cat with eyes like moonlight, a raven whose feathers glistened with hidden rainbows, or even a fox with fiery fur and a mischievous grin.

Her heart raced at the possibilities. Would her own familiar be an animal fierce and cunning? Wise and mysterious? The anticipation was almost too much to bear. The amulet tugged her forward, an unseen thread guiding her deeper into the mossy embrace of the forest.

She walked until the afternoon sun just touched the western hillside, the only sounds the crunch of twigs under her feet and the occasional trill of a songbird settling in for the evening. Then she saw a perfect ring of mushrooms glowing faintly in the fading light. She smiled. She knew she'd found the place of enchantment.

Her grandmother's voice echoed again in her mind: "The mushroom amulet will find your heart's companion, but a lesson will find you first."

The girl knelt at the edge of the ring, her breath catching. She closed

her eyes and pressed the amulet to her lips, whispering, "Show me." The air shimmered, and for a moment, she felt weightless, as if the forest had exhaled and carried her with it.

When she opened her eyes, the ring of mushrooms had changed. They now glowed a bright pink, and sitting in their center was a dog.

Not a sleek, young creature like she'd imagined, but an old, scruffy mutt with graying fur and tired eyes. His ears were floppy, his paws worn, and he sat quietly, looking at her with a mix of curiosity and something else, something deeper.

The girl blinked, waiting for her true familiar to appear. But the dog remained, his gaze steady. Disappointment prickled in her chest. This was her familiar? She'd expected something extraordinary, something magical. But this was just ... a dog.

The amulet warmed against her skin, as if nudging her: *Look closer.*

The girl stepped into the ring and crouched before the dog. His eyes met hers, and in that moment, the forest around her seemed to fade. She saw his story through his eyes—years of loyalty, of companionship given and taken for granted, of being left behind when age slowed his steps. He had loved deeply, and that love had gone unnoticed.

Her heart softened. "You're tired," she whispered. She reached out a hand, and the dog leaned into her touch, his tail thumping weakly against the ground.

As their connection deepened, the girl felt threads of magic binding them together. It wasn't the fiery spark she'd imagined but a steady, grounding warmth, like the embers of a hearth fire that never truly dies.

"You're my familiar," she said, not as a question but as a truth. The dog huffed softly, a sound that felt like agreement, and licked her hand with surprising gentleness.

The journey home began in silence,

the dog trotting beside her, his pace careful but determined, his presence solid and comforting. When they paused by a stream to rest, he nudged her hand with his nose, his eyes full of quiet understanding. He didn't ask for anything but gave her everything—his trust, his loyalty, his companionship.

By the time they reached her cottage, her disappointment had melted into something warm and tender. She saw him now for what he truly was, a soul who'd waited for her as long as she'd waited for him. He wasn't sleek or majestic, but he was hers, and that made him extraordinary.

She named him Sage, for his wisdom and quiet strength.

Over the weeks and months that followed, Sage taught her the magic of patience, of quiet devotion, and of love that expects nothing in return. He was always there, steady as the earth beneath her feet, and his loyalty brought a new kind of magic into her life, one she hadn't known she needed.

The girl learned that love wasn't about grand gestures or perfect appearances. It was about acceptance, about seeing the beauty in what others overlooked. Sage, with his graying fur and gentle eyes, was the embodiment of that lesson.

Years later, the girl, who had by now transformed into a powerful witch, sat on the porch of her forest cottage, gazing at the patch of earth beneath the old oak where Sage now rested. The moss had grown thick over his grave, a soft, green testament to the passing seasons. In her hand, she held the mushroom amulet, its surface worn smooth from years of touch.

She thought often of her familiar, his gentle eyes and steady presence lingering like the scent of the forest after rain. He had taught her so much. He'd shown her the beauty of the overlooked, the strength in resilience, and the grace in accepting the impermanence of life.

While real amanitas can be deadly for dogs—like twelve-year-old Chesapeake Bay Retriever, aspiring top model, and good boy Si here—rest assured that Si is surrounded only by hand-sculpted foam mushrooms found in fairyland ... and author Monica Crosson's backyard.

Photography by
Alexandria Corne



THE MAGIC OF SECOND CHANCES

If you've ever thought about bringing a familiar into your life, I urge you to look beyond the playful puppies and excitable young dogs. Puppies tumble over each other in playful chaos, and younger dogs press their noses to the bars, brimming with energy and possibility. And there, in the quiet corners, are the seniors, waiting. Walking through a shelter, it's easy to pass them by—but just take a moment to visit with them. Meet their gazes and listen to what their eyes are telling you.

There's a certain wisdom in the eyes of an older dog, a depth that speaks to a lifetime of stories they cannot tell us but

carry in every wag of their tail.

Our culture prizes youth, even when it comes to our furry companions. But as someone who believes in the transformative magic of second chances, I see older shelter dogs as treasures, their graying muzzles and slower steps a testament to their enduring spirit. These dogs, cast aside through no fault of their own, still have so much to give.

Older dogs carry with them the kind of quiet magic that comes only from experience. They've lived, loved, and sometimes lost, but their hearts remain open to connection. Adopting an older dog is like opening a well-loved book;

there's already a richness to the story, but together, you get to write a beautiful new chapter.

In a society that celebrates busyness, older dogs teach us the value of stillness. They're content to nap by your feet as you work or amble alongside you during a gentle walk. Their pace invites us to pause and savor the small, sacred moments.

Senior dogs know what it's like to lose their place in the world. Whether they've been surrendered by families who could no longer care for them or have spent years in a shelter, their resilience is profound. And when you adopt them, their gratitude is palpable. It's in the way

they rest their head on your knee or wag their tail at the sound of your voice. When you adopt an older dog, you’re not just giving them a home—you’re giving them dignity, respect, and a chance to feel cherished once more. And the

magic? It’s mutual. Caring for a senior dog shifts your perspective, grounding you in what truly matters: love, connection, and the fleeting beauty of time. Adopting an older dog isn’t just about giving them a home; it’s about creating a

partnership steeped in love and gratitude. It’s about finding magic in unexpected places and realizing that sometimes, the greatest treasures are the ones we almost overlook.



CRAFTING A MUSHROOM AMULET NECKLACE

Craft your own mushroom amulet as a reminder that the magic of an old familiar never truly passes. It transforms, like a mushroom in the forest—always offering a little bit of enchantment for those willing to look closely enough.



- Materials Needed:
- Foam clay (I use Modelite), 4 to 8 ounces
 - A toothpick or other small sculpting tool
 - Acrylic paint
 - Clear craft sealer (I use Mod Podge spray concealer)
 - Hot glue and a glue gun
 - An eye pin
 - A 24-inch length of cording of your choice
 - A crystal of your choice (optional)

To form the mushroom cap, start with a ball of foam clay. Roll it between your palms until the ball is nice and round. Then flatten it slightly on bottom. You can press the edges of the cap gently with your fingers to create a subtle, curled edge that mimics the natural look.

To form the stem, roll a smaller portion of clay into a cylindrical shape. Don’t worry about making it perfectly smooth; uneven texture and imperfections will add character. Keep the stem proportional to the size of the cap.

Using a dab of hot glue, gently press the bottom of the cap onto the top of the stem and hold for several seconds to fuse the two together.

If you’re adding a crystal to the stem’s bottom, press it into the bottom of the stem to create a tailor-made space. Remove it when you let the mushroom dry.

Use a toothpick or sculpting tool to add natural texture to the cap and stem. You might want to make little indentations on the cap to resemble the tiny scales or grooves that mushrooms often have. You can also add small dots of white clay for classic “spots.”

Allow your mushroom to dry for up to 72 hours, depending on thickness. Use the directions on the clay package as a guide.

Paint your mushroom in any way you wish with acrylic paint. Once it’s dry, give it a coat of sealer for protection.

If making a corded amulet, push an eye pin through the top of the cap and add a small drop of glue to hold it in place. When the glue is dry, string with cording of your choice.

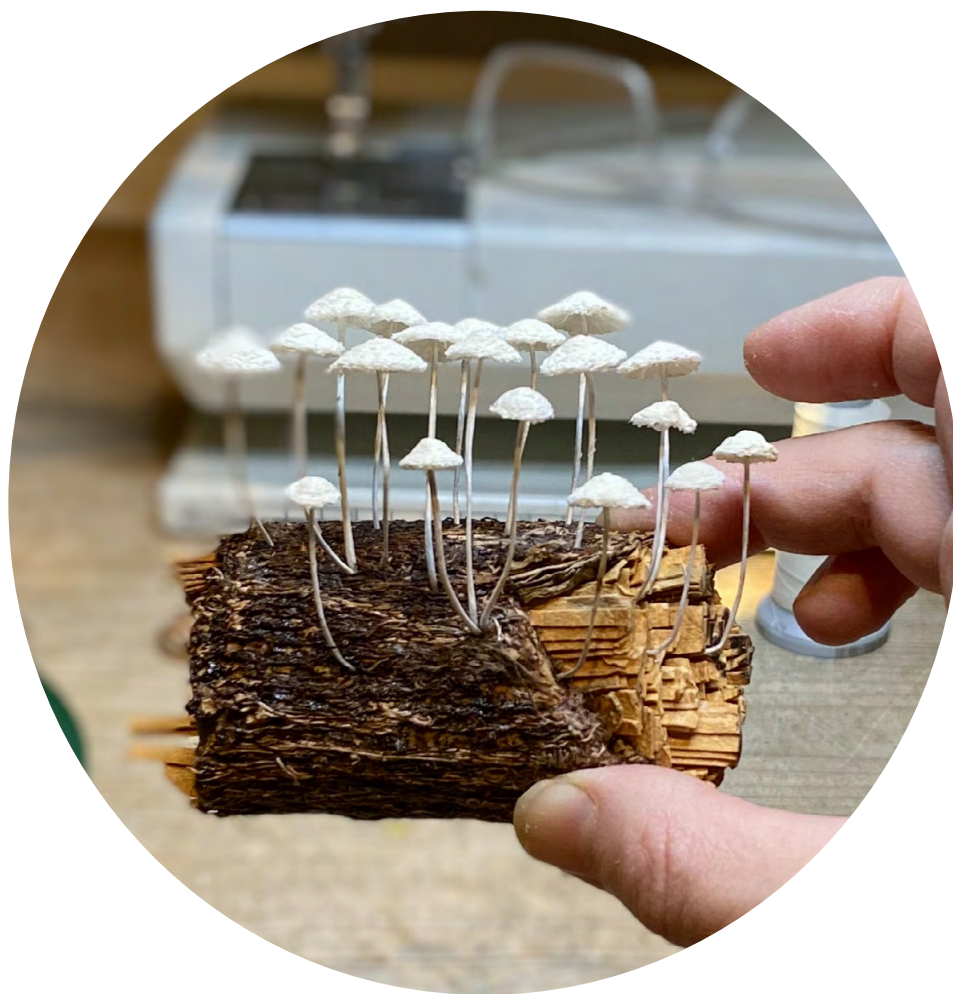
Glue in your crystal and allow to dry.

Note: You can always push stiff wire into the bottom of the stem after painting and then seal your mushroom again if you want to use it for a yard or garden project. A group of these shrooms will stand up perfectly and add a bit of magic to any garden party or event. They might even attract a familiar!

Monica Crosson is the author of several books, including Wild Magical Soul: Untame Your Spirit & Connect to Nature’s Wisdom and her latest, A Year in the Enchanted Garden. Learn more at authormonicacrosson.com and follow her on Instagram @monicacrosson. See more of Alexandria Corne’s work on Instagram @alexandriacornephotography.



One of the many mushroom and flower flat-lays by Sherrie Sanville, who resides on 120 acres of wooded property in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan and enjoys foraging and collecting year round. She gathered everything above during early spring, including morels, pheasant back mushrooms, tulips and daffodils from her flower garden, and shed antlers from the deer trails around her home. See more of her work on Instagram @morel_momma.



Featured Artist

AMANDA COBBETT

Picture them under glass: four small pieces of bark covered from left to right with the delicate white fungi *Cudoniella acicularis*, which is found on rotting logs; the feather moss *Eurhynchium straitum*, common throughout the wood; the cup-shaped blue fungus *Chlorospenium aeruginascens*; and in clusters of orange discs, the *Anthracoia macrocystis*—all gorgeous scientific specimens, carefully collected as if straight from the forest floor. Except these are made from ... silk and thread? Thousands of miles of thread to be exact, and no small amount of enchantment.

Fiber artist Amanda Cobbett had been working for more than a decade designing textiles when she found herself wanting to sculpt and make three-dimensional art—both of which she’d done in school—once more. She also wanted to find a way to preserve the objects she foraged during the long walks she’d take with her dogs and children through the forest near her home in Surrey, England. A family friend had given her an old Bernina sewing machine, and she started experimenting. When her children’s school needed cakes for a fundraiser, she thought maybe she’d embroider replicas of her forest finds instead, just to see. They sold out. When she made more for the Chelsea Flower Show, they sold out too.

As she continued to experiment, dissolvable fabric was a huge revelation. She put it into an embroiderer’s hoop and used her machine to build up layers of thread. She discovered that when she washed away the carrier fabric, the embroidered thread that remained created a new textile she could use in her sculptural pieces. Using other materials as well, she developed new techniques for replicating what she saw in nature: She made papier-mâché stems for the fungi and covered them with fine silk, then embellished them with sewing, markers, and burning techniques.

Currently, she’s exploring and then replicating in thread the fungi and lichens on the various estates belonging to a duke in Scotland. She has a long waiting list of future commissions. And she won’t be bored anytime soon. “Different threads behave differently when put together, so the possibilities are endless,” she says. There’s always a new discovery on the horizon—or underfoot: “We’re naturally inclined to look at the bigger picture, but then we risk missing the tiny details that can be found all around us.”

See more of Amanda Cobbett’s work at amandacobbett.com or on Instagram @amandacobbett.



An Autumn Revel (1921), by Ida Rentoul Outhwaite



BY ALISE MARIE, THE BEAUTY WITCH®

In the damp thickets of spring's newly naked earth, a supersonic network of sorcery whispers its ancient codes, as strange and beautiful contours begin to appear—from tiny white fairy rings to wild-hued mini monoliths—and one of nature's most powerful offerings comes out to play: the magical, mysterious mushroom. These bewitching oddities hold us in their sway, inspiring both adoration *and* fear for the potency they bring. Like most magical things, they can heal as well as harm.

Tripped-out surrealistic wanderings and plant medicine aside, what role do mushrooms play in beauty? I'm so glad you asked. Get ready for the latest addition to your beauty rituals: Here come the fabulous fungi ...

Adaptogen mushrooms have been pillars of the holistic world for many moons and have become trendy beauty buzzwords of late, but that's because these treasures hold *intense* regenerative powers, *mes amours*. They're the very essence of spring renewal, youthful vitality, and longevity, as

they amplify your beauty magnetism head to toe, inside and out, by accelerating cellular turnover, managing stress, and strengthening the immune system. Whereas herbs require use in cycles to be effective, adaptogens can be taken daily and long-term, because they act in a manner similar to a thermostat: When you have too little or too much, they adjust accordingly. Internally, this translates to lowered stress and quelled anxiety (*adieu*, fine lines!), better beauty sleep, and a sharper (sexier) brain. And speaking of sexy, adding *mmm-mm* mycelium to your rituals amps up your drive *and* your pleasure.

Now when it comes to anointing your heavenly body with *champignons charmants*, the starry sky is the limit! All mushrooms contain polysaccharides, which keep skin hydrated and retain that moisture by protecting your natural skin barrier. This prevents the dryness that causes and intensifies fine lines and wrinkles. Pair that with mushrooms' other superpowers, and you've got one seriously impressive new cohort.

Spring Forest Beauty

The Beauty Witch

In all my years (centuries?) of including mushrooms among my retinue of wellness advisers, I have come to simplify things out of necessity in a madly busy life—and here I pass along one of my absolute favorite things to keep on hand: a powdered blend of medicinal, adaptogen mushrooms that hits *all* the notes. It takes the hassle (not to mention the expense) out of stockpiling a million different things and the tedium out of measuring minuscule bits of ingredients to create what I need. Though there are many varieties of mushroom delights and all contain potent antioxidants, I like using a combination of these rock stars:

Chaga
Chaga strengthens the immune system, stabilizes blood pressure and blood sugar, aids digestion, and boasts impressive antioxidant properties, all wrapped up in UV protection. It can prevent early signs of aging such as dullness, wrinkles, and sagging, since it repairs cells and can reduce the existing signs of damage. Plus, it helps hair growth.

Lion’s Mane
Though it’s known primarily for supporting cognitive function, brain health, and memory, it also increases collagen and elastin production. And as its name suggests, this dandy stimulates hair follicles for gorgeous growth.

Cordyceps
Cordyceps provides long-lasting, stable energy, plus increased stamina, endurance, and sexual vitality. Mushrooms in this genus also keep skin energized and glowing by stimulating blood flow and increasing hydration, collagen, and elastin production. And they soothe and heal redness and other skin irritations, nourish the scalp, and promote hair growth.

Reishi
Ravishing reishi relieves stress and promotes restful beauty

sleep. Deeply hydrating and detoxifying, its antioxidant and anti-inflammatory benefits help fight against premature aging, redness, irritation, and damage. It helps your body synthesize ceramide, which makes up the protective layer of your skin, plus it promotes elasticity, fades scarring, *and* reduces hair loss.

Turkey Tail
This treasure gives a potent immune boost and aids gorgeousness with prebiotics and healthy digestion, resulting in a healthy glow. Turkey tail also manages stress, enhances mood, and supports emotional wellbeing.

Shiitake
These babies are prized for their ability to protect your immune system and keep you healthy. Their blend of antioxidant, anti-inflammatory magic helps prevent the breakdown of cells, protect skin from harmful bacteria, aid in recovery, reduce redness, and depuff. Shiitake promotes overall balanced, brightened, and calm skin.

For a sourcing reference, I’ve been sticking with Om Master Blend Mushroom Powder, an organic combination of ten mushroom species plus my beloved super adaptogen, ashwagandha (an evergreen shrub). It is easily found online, in health food shops, and even some groceries.

So, *mignonettes*, gather your goodies and prepare to conjure seductive sorcery! I love concocting these potions beneath the first brand new moon of spring to draw in the season and set the vibration high for the months ahead. Whatever you’ve been hatching over the winter now has wings ... so allow your wishes to soar through the skies of the new astrological year and bring your heart’s desire straight to you. You’ll be ready—and more gorgeous and full of life than the world can even handle.

AWAKEN THE SENSES
Facial

Conjures 1 to 2 treatments
1 teaspoon mushroom blend powder
(such as Om Master Blend)
2 tablespoons oat flour
¼ cup chia seed oil
¼ cup almond milk

In a small bowl, whisk together all the ingredients until well blended, adding more almond milk as needed to reach a desired consistency. (I like it best when it’s somewhere between a mousse and melty ice cream.) Apply to a cleansed face in a circular motion, lifting away dead skin cells and revving circulation.

Apply a second layer—don’t forget the neck, décolleté, and even the backs of your hands—and allow it to set while you lounge about. Let it work its magic for 10 to 20 minutes, then remove with a warm, wet face cloth. Rinse well. Pat dry and follow with your best beauty oils and sunscreen if you’re headed outside. This one has the most delicious scent! Its creamy texture feels entirely decadent to apply, and, oh, the results—firmed, lifted, smooth, and glowing!

Joining our marvelous mycelium, of course, are a few other divine friends:
Oat
Venusian oats contain not only her beauty magic but a generous dollop of abundance as well. Ground into flour,

oats provide a gentle yet thorough manual exfoliation while soothing and calming skin. Oats are also humectant, drawing moisture into skin.

Chia
Rich in omega-3 oils, chia is a powerhouse moisturizer for even very dry and irritated skin, quenching it and healing seasonal shifts to your visage.

I love it for coming out of the cold, harsh months and reviving your whole body!

Almond
In its creamy form as a dairy alternative with a high nutrient content, almond is rich in calcium and vitamin E. Beautifying and strengthening, it carries added magic for money, luck, and healing



Beauty Witch Secret: Speaking of best beauty oils, did you know that my Bouclier de Freya contains mushroom peptides? Oh yes. *The best.* And did you know that adding a few drops of her to your masque will amp up the results amazingly? *Oui.*

FOCUS POCUS LATTE
Beauty Brew

Conjures 2 servings
1 teaspoon loose chai tea blend
1 teaspoon mushroom blend powder
1 teaspoon raw cacao powder
1½ cups spring water
½ cup almond milk

Begin by heating the water to a near boil. While it heats, add the chai tea, mushroom blend, and cacao to a French



press or heat-safe container. Add the hot water, stir, and allow the blend to steep for 3 to 5 minutes while you warm the almond milk. Press or strain the brew, then pour into the warmed milk. (Got a frother? Fantastic! Froth the milk first.) Add a bit of non-refined sweetener if desired, such as maple syrup, stevia, pure monkfruit, or coconut nectar. Sip it slowly, drinking in the magic. Visualize and feel your desires—the fire in the blend will help you to get them out into the world.
A version of this concoction appears in my book, *The Beauty Witch’s Secrets*, and I love it as a creamy latte. It gives energy and mental clarity, *sans* the jitters of coffee ... though if you wish to add coffee into the mix, feel free—you’ll need way less and you’ll still feel sated.
On its own, it has an amazing ability to balance, energize, and brighten your

mood. It also staves off the mid-morning or afternoon cravings for something carbs-y and sugary, which do *not* do your beauty any justice whatsoever. Instead, this brew makes you feel so good, your body naturally relaxes into a feline state, and your face lights up!
Chai
Spicy chai tea in its pure form (*not* the commercial sugary blend) increases circulation for glowing skin, and it contains antioxidants to help prevent fine lines and wrinkles. It holds the magic of fire.
Cacao
High in antioxidants, vitamins, and minerals, fiery cacao is a superior beauty food blessed with the enchantments of a mood-elevating aphrodisiac. This love food increases blood flow and serotonin levels, enhancing mood and stirring sexual desire.

Beauty Witch Secret: I just adore adding seasonal treats to my brew—do try it! Cinnamon, cloves, chili pepper, lavender, rose, saffron ... I could go on forever. See what you’re drawn to. Chances are, it’s what you need.

NOUVELLE PEAU
Body Oil

*Conjures approximately 3 ounces
2½ ounces chia seed oil
1 teaspoon mushroom blend powder
1 teaspoon carrot seed oil or extract
6 drops jasmine oil*

Fetch a stunning potion bottle, one with a good stopper, and let the conjuring begin! Carefully pour the

chia seed oil into the vessel (I use a mini funnel), then add the mushroom powder. Give it a good swirl to combine. If you can get something very thin in there to mix it, like a toothpick or a straw, that will help. Next, add in the carrot seed extract and the jasmine, and give it another swirl. Let the mixture rest overnight in the energy of the new moon, then allow it to greet the first rays of morning light. I love adding a few crystals and flowers for even more beauty magic. (Here, I’ve used citrine and dried jasmine buds.) For extra potency, let your mixture steep until the full moon, then use it liberally all over your body. If you simply cannot wait, use it right away. As long as the mushroom powder has dissolved, it will be ready to go!

Glide it along your flesh for a deliciously sensual experience of pure beauty.

Carrot Seed

Fiery carrots are lusty bringers of sexual desire. Mars-ruled, they contain active age-delay properties. The seed oil provides a natural sunscreen, is loaded with antioxidants, and amps up circulation, which gives the skin a healthy glow.

Jasmine

Called the Queen of the Night, sensual jasmine is an intoxicating aphrodisiac that knows a thing or two about beauty. Yielding a brilliant oil for reducing fine lines and strengthening skin’s elasticity, jasmine also helps fade scars and hyperpigmentation.

Beauty Witch Secret: If you can get your paws on it, carrot *root* oil or extract is full of vitamin A and does wonders as a natural retinol.

Alise Marie is the author of The Beauty Witch’s Secrets: Recipes and Rituals for the Modern Goddess, available wherever books are sold. Find her at thebeautywitch.com and on Instagram @thebeautywitchofficial.



Nouvelle PEAU

Model and designer:
DESIRÉE ANDERSON
@dmandersonartist

Photography: Autumn Luciano Studios
@autumnlucianostudios



What would a mushroom fairy wear? To answer this question, artist Desireé Anderson bounced ideas back and forth with Wendy Froud to come up with the idea of a fairy gown, muted and tattered like dry leaves, with a bustle made from shelf fungus. Anderson created each turkey tail mushroom from special thermoplastic fabric—cutting, heating, and sculpting it, then individually painting it with layers of color before hand-sewing it to the dress’s bustle. The result? A gown that seems fashioned from the forest floor itself. *See more of Desireé’s work at dmandersonartist.com.*



What Shines in the Dark
by Katrina Haffner



The Gathering

Featured Artist

KATRINA HAFFNER

Katrina Haffner's love of mushrooms began as a child, when she and her family went hiking in the Oregon woods and stumbled on some *Amanita muscaria*. The surprise of their ruddy, otherworldly beauty captured her imagination, and she was convinced, she says, that fairies were afoot.

Decades later, she still gets a thrill every time she finds amanita in the wild. This is how she stays enchanted—by tapping into the wonder of her first childhood encounter with natural magic. Spending time in wild nature comforts and sustains her artistic spirit; it makes her “feel nurtured by something honest and pure.”

Mushrooms are one of her favorite subjects to paint, she says, partly because they're so diverse in color and structure, so physically stunning—and even more because they're mysterious. That's probably why her pictures are both eerie and charming at once.

The more she learns about mushrooms and the remarkable symbiosis of which they're capable, she says, the more she realizes that each organism on earth is connected to others in ways we can't see. So it seems as natural as it is brilliant that in the two gouache paintings shown here, the mushrooms seem to be growing out of the animals. That type of connection is a hallmark of Haffner's art. When we asked what the fusion means to her, she responded that some people tell her that her images “bring up thoughts of death or suffering,” but she has a different take: “I think it's healthy to contemplate your mortality and the cycle of life in a way that makes you feel connected instead of disconnected. For me, it's expressing an emotion, a feeling of being entwined with everything.”

Her work is, more than anything, a celebration. As she puts it, it's “a reminder of our origin, fragility, and connection to the wild animal spirit.”

See more of Katrina's work on Instagram @katrina_haffner.



Hollow Bones by Katrina Haffner

HOW WE BEGIN IS NOT HOW WE END

by Briana Saussy

As I'm down on all fours, balanced on one hand and one knee with my opposite leg suspended in the air behind me, I hear the instructor intone, "How we begin is not how we end." He means that our physical state is always changing, that we walk out of the barre studio a little stronger, a little more flexible than we were when we came in.

The year is preparing to turn as I write this, and as it does, millions of people will resolve to begin the New Year by acting, speaking, eating, working, relating to others, and simply *being* in a way that is different from and hopefully better than whatever they did before. A lot of coaches like to focus on how quickly many resolutions are forgotten or broken, but I think it's remarkable that we always resolve to change, and how deep down we *know* that how we begin is not—and doesn't have to be—how we end.

I like to take my prayers outside. Next to the swing and the backyard fountain is a patch of dirt that wasn't always there. When we first moved into the house there was a tough, gnarled tree stump in its place. I don't know what happened to the tree, but I do know that our local mushroom population loved that stump. I watched as a variety of fungi worked on the wood, slowly breaking it down until it disappeared completely. Although it didn't, not really. It just changed.

I've always loved mushrooms. Forever associating them with magic and the line that they straddle—nourishment and healing on one side, death on the other—I find their folklore and their varieties endlessly fascinating. In school we learned to call them decomposers, a special class of plant and fungi that feeds on organisms already dead, thus transforming death into something that can support life once more.

Death is not an end but a new beginning may sound like a cliché, but the fact is that everything in and around us is constantly dying, transforming, and becoming something else. Fungi are the allies that remind us that such a cliché also happens to be absolute truth.

Interestingly, advanced medical research into fungi reveals similar functions on a less physical or literal plane. Many people ingest reishi and lion's mane to bring life back to overtaxed immune systems. Some scientists are experimenting with various

species of psilocybin, exploring their use not just for a good time but also to help people trapped in psychological death states, which might include emotional paralysis, deep depression, and trauma that leave them feeling frozen and isolated.

In his wonderful book on all things fungal, *Entangled Life: How Fungi Make Our Worlds, Change Our Minds, and Shape Our Futures*, Merlin Sheldrake points out that the treatment of bacterial infections with antibiotics is being challenged in a deep way by fungal infections, which are poised to become more frequent and deadly. This danger has spurred medical researchers to find new and better treatment protocols and has served as a reminder to all of us that an overreliance on antibiotics leaves everyone vulnerable.

I spread truffle-infused honey on a slice of hot buttered bread for my oldest son. He's been through so much: loss of vision in one eye, the possibility of losing vision in the other eye, the relief when the medical procedure worked and preserved that second eye's sight. Through it all—the trauma, the surgeries, the fear—he has been so brave ... and he's grown so tall that he now towers above me. He's grown too in talent, in his ability as a cellist, pianist, and composer, and most of all in wisdom. I think about the changes he's been through, and then my gaze falls on an orange and blue ceramic piece made by my youngest son. It's a mushroom. I keep it on my desk to remind me that how we begin is not how we end. Living life leaves a mark.

I am back in class, this time doing forward and reverse lunges at the barre. I breathe into the motion. I reflect on how the greatest quality of fungus is not that it decomposes or that it can open doors of perception, but that it connects. Tiny white hyphae reach for each other, fungal filaments that we now know are required for life, because connection is required for life. Connection of tree to tree and tree to forest and forest to forest; connection of soil to soil, of each web of life to all others.

My hair is damp with sweat; my thoughts turn to spring and that patch of dirt in my backyard where there used to be a stump of wood. What shall I plant there this season? What new life has death made way for? What is ready to grow? I'm not sure yet, but I'm ready to find out.



Briana Saussy is an author, storyteller, teacher, spiritual counselor, and founder of the Sacred Arts Academy, where she teaches magic, divination, ceremony, and other sacred arts for everyday life. She is the author of Making Magic: Weaving Together the Everyday and the Extraordinary, and Star Child: Joyful Parenting Through Astrology. See more at brianasaussy.com.

FROM OUR READERS

FOR THIS ISSUE, WE ASKED, WHAT IS IT ABOUT MUSHROOMS THAT MAKES THEM SO ENCHANTING?

The fact that they can grow quickly overnight makes them seem magical, as if a fairy waved her wand and just made them appear out of nowhere. A single amethyst deceiver can make an ordinary patch of moss look like an enchanted miniature world. Add a little fern in there and you've got yourself a perfect scene to paint. —*@faustaforrest*

Mushrooms invite us to embrace change, to explore the unseen magic in the world, and to uncover beauty in decay and renewal. They remind me of how life is a constant cycle of reflecting, releasing, and growing. —*Rachel L. Hansen*

When I'm out walking, I never know what I'm going to find. One day there'll be a cluster of brown mushrooms branching up from the dirt, seemingly overnight. The next day, a scatter of bright orange fungi on the side of a log, or a fairy ring on someone's lawn. If I slow down and pay attention, there's always a new surprise. —*@mary.makes.stuff*

I once discovered a group of miniature lavender mushrooms smaller than my pinky nail. There were maybe a dozen clustered together. Suddenly I was back in old Edo Japan, on a narrow street, watching a group of geishas holding their delicate lavender umbrellas and strolling through the mist. —*Cynthia Hamrick*

Their color, their details, their feminine energy. Mushrooms are like blades of grass dressed for an evening out. —*@ellorygrace*

The element of surprise upon stumbling across a mushroom is what I find enchanting! They do not grace us with their presence at all times but seemingly appear out of nowhere when the temperature and soil conditions are just right. How lovely they are to find on a stroll in the woods! —*Carla Lackner*

Meeting a mushroom is like meeting a magical friend, one that perhaps you didn't even know you needed in your life, one that has traveled a different course—but thankfully the fates wove your paths together, and now you can sit and catch up in the lovely stillness of a forgotten wood. —*@thewillowandthevine*

I love discovering mushrooms along trails during our hiking adventures! Like snowflakes, no two are alike. It's like finding precious little gemstones the fairies have strewn along our paths. —*Debra Wilcox*

What I find most enchanting is that each mushroom has a special relationship with another species, whether plant, insect, animal, or bird. Their survival is entangled with that of the rest of the kingdoms. Plus, each mushroom is unique from the others. The edible ones all hold different benefits to our bodies and souls. —*@m.pallas.studio*

What makes mushrooms so enchanting to me is the way they serve such an important role while being somewhat invisible! Mushroom mycelia create and promote symbiotic relationships in the soil beneath our feet. They're truly magical in the ways they help with nutrient distribution and communication between plants and fungi. The evidence of their work is all around us, though we never witness the actual process. Pretty enchanting, if you ask me! —*@the_astro_yogi*

Mushrooms feel otherworldly: not quite plant, not quite animal. They feel out of place and like a sign that not all is what it seems! Plus, they're adorable. Which makes it hard to resist any and all fairy rings I come across. One of these days I'll find the one that takes me to the fae wilds! —*Erica Rowan*

When we discover one in real life, it's as if a tiny piece from a hidden fairy-tale world has popped up in ours and sparks wonder and enchantment. For me, their diverse shapes and colors are a never-ending source of inspiration in my creative process. —*@yasminbochi*

Mushrooms are enchanting in such an unassuming way. They'll quietly add enchantment to the world regardless of whether we notice them or not. As if enchantment were their only purpose. —*@offpagesandpinecones*

I love how we see woodland folk portrayed sitting on or under mushrooms or wearing them as hats. And how mushrooms randomly grow in circles or appear in all sizes, among bright green colors deep in a forest. —*Susan Griffin*

Fairy Rings and Toadstools (1875), by Richard Doyle

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