

Medicinal Mushrooms in Polish Folk Medicine

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Mushrooms with fruiting bodies large enough to be noticed with the naked human eye and to be picked by hand are generally said to be mushrooms or toadstools (sometimes called bracket mushrooms). Both mushrooms and toadstools (often called mycophilic) have been used in folk medicine in many nations throughout the world since ancient times. Some recent discoveries have led us to suppose that it may have been since the Stone Age (or maybe even earlier). Medicinal mushrooms have been used mainly in Asiatic countries—China, Far East of Russia, Japan, Korea, and nations of the Indonesian Peninsula; in Slavonic countries—mainly Russia, Ukraine, and Byelorussia, but also Poland; and in Native American tribes. But some evidence is also known from African tribes, from India, from Papua—New Guinea, and even from Australia from the Aborigines. Ordinary people were familiar with therapeutic effects of mushrooms such as antifungal, antiinflammatory, antiinfectious, antiparasitic, heart protective, hepatoprotective, kidney tonic, nerve tonic, pulmonary protective, sexually potentiative (aphrodisiacs), and antidiabetic. Some mushrooms were also known throughout the world as panaceas.

In Poland folk knowledge about therapeutic effects of mushrooms is relatively limited today. But in the appropriate literature from the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century we can find some information on the subject. Some further particulars can be obtained from old people from moun-

tain regions and from people living in areas adjoining the Ukrainian and Byelorussian nations mainly. Bracket mushrooms are the most popular. The larch bracket mushroom (*Laricifomes officinalis* (Vill.) Kotl. et Pouzar) has been listed in use against bleeding, festering wounds, hemorrhoids, vomiting, spasmodic coughing, rheumatism, and as *elixirium ad longam vitam*. The pear bracket mushroom (*Polyporus* sp. growing on a pear trees) was used against infections, toothache for example. The hoof bracket mushroom (*Fomes fomentarius* (L.) Fr.) was used as *fungus chirurgorum* and hemostipticum. The black birch bracket mushroom (*Inonotus obliquus* (Pers.) Pilát) and white birch bracket mushroom (*Piptoporus betulinus* (Bull.) P. Karst.) were used mainly as anticancer drugs. Some other mushrooms were also applied. *Lactarius* sp. was used against diseases of urinary tracts. Judas' ear (*Auricularia auricula-judae* (Bull.) Wettst.) was used as a remedy in ear and eye problems. Puffballs (*Calvatia* sp., *Bovista* sp., and *Langermannia* sp.) were applied as aseptic powder and stinkhorns (*Phallus* sp.) as aphrodisiacs. The oak bracket mushrooms (*Daedalea quercina* (L.) Pers.) and a fly agaric (*Amanita muscaria* (L.) Hook.) were very popular as anti-insect agents. A few rare applications of mushrooms were also found. This knowledge of Polish folk use of mushrooms may be a useful supplement to the general science of medicinal mushrooms.