

Mushroom — Slaaparaaq, Sliyaaparaq

SUUPALITAARTUT SLIYAAPARANЕК. – THEY MAKE SOUP OUT OF MUSHROOMS.



Photo: A pair of poisonous fly agaric mushrooms.

Cool temperatures, darkening days, and wet weather are all signs of fall in Alaska, and of mushroom season. Mushrooms are fungi, the fruit of plants that grow underground and obtain their nourishment from decomposing matter rather than sunlight. These delicate plants reproduce quickly when temperature and rainfall are just right. In Alaska, mushrooms are most common in late summer and early fall and can be found as far north as the Arctic Circle.

Although mushrooms are colorful and fun to find, many are poisonous. For example, the fly agaric (*Amanita muscaria*), a common gilled mushroom with a white stalk and a speckled orange cap, is deadly. Never eat a wild mushroom unless you are certain of its identity and that it is safe to consume.

Although not widely collected by Alutiiq people today, Elders recall their parents gathering and cooking mushrooms. Some varieties were cooked with fish and onions. Others, like the bolete (*Leccinum insigne*), were fried in butter. In Larsen Bay, people once gathered and stored puffball mushrooms (*Lycoperdon*) for medicinal purposes. As the puffball ages, it darkens and its insides become powdery. Alutiiq people applied the powder to burns and skin infections to promote healing, particularly wounds that were slow to close. Puffball powder might also be applied to a fresh injury to prevent future infection. Mushrooms are still collected by Kenai Peninsula Alutiiq people, who snack on some varieties while walking in the woods.