



# Potomac Sporophore

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Spring Edition

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## **MAW DUES**

The annual membership fee for participation in all MAW events is due in January of every year. Dues are \$20.00 for individuals and \$30.00 for a household. You cannot attend the meetings where mushroom dishes are prepared (April and October) unless you are a member and your dues are paid. You can pay at any meeting or you can send your dues to:

Membership Chair  
4509 Windom Place  
Washington, DC, 20016

In terms of MAW membership demographics:

Current membership - 208 (65 new members since 1 January 2008)

- Washington DC - 27
- Maryland - 85
- Virginia - 28
- Other - 3

Longest members of record

- Ray LaSala - 1981
- Jon Ellifritz - 1986
- Gerry Barton - 1988



## **From the MAW President**

Ray LaSala

At the suggestion of William Needham, our newsletter will feature a President's Column from now on. I plan to use this space to let you know my point of view on various matters of interest to MAW.

I think a good way to start is to suggest that we rethink the way we conduct our Tasting Meetings. When I joined MAW back in 1981, our Tasting Meeting overflowed with fresh wild mushrooms brought in by members. The mushrooms were prepared very simply so that the emphasis was on them and not the culinary skills of the preparer. There were no fees or elaborate sign-in procedures. Only fresh, identifiable edible mushrooms were allowed in, but there was no problem if you didn't have any. The food may have been rather mundane, but everybody (at least all the novices) learned what the various wild mushrooms in our area tasted like.

Over the years, our Tasting Meetings have evolved into sophisticated and immensely popular pot-luck dinner parties. They often serve up some very good food and foster camaraderie among our members, and they generate significant revenue and new membership. However, I'm very concerned about several aspects of our Tasting Meetings as they are currently constituted. The supply of fresh wild mushrooms brought to

these meetings has diminished so much that they no longer provide much of an opportunity for members to learn what the edible wild mushrooms that grow in our area taste like. There's simply not that much wild material being brought in fresh and whole. The size and enthusiasm of the crowd is such that it can be tough to stay on top of what's going on. A significant fraction of those who attend do not even show up at any other MAW event—they just like the mushroom-themed buffets.

I'm wondering if we might not be better off with a different format, with more emphasis on tasting wild mushrooms and less on individual culinary accomplishments. I think fresh, local, and wild mushrooms should be emphasized. We can ask our more experienced members to bring frozen or dried out-of-season wild mushrooms as long as they can be identified, and we might even consider purchasing some wild mushrooms from commercial sources. If this sounds too Spartan in comparison to what we currently do, maybe we can do some of each.

I realize that this might not sit too well with those who look forward to the swell parties that our Tasting Meetings currently are. Not to worry—nothing will change without the Board—and the Culinary Chair in particular—being involved in the decision. But your opinion can help us decide what if anything to change. So please express your opinion by contacting me or Alan Remchuck, the Culinary Chair. Since the next Tasting Meeting is coming up in April, I wouldn't expect much if anything to change by then. But October might be another story....

## **2009 Scheduled Events**

As of this newsletter, all MAW meetings are held at the Davis Public Library. Montgomery County recently decided that the Chevy Chase Public Library, our former meeting place, had other higher priorities for the first Tuesday of the month and that we could no longer meet there.

### **Meeting Site Directions - Davis Public Library**

The Davis Library is located one long block away from the intersection of Democracy Boulevard and Old Georgetown Road, MD Route 187, at the approximate center of the triangle formed by the Capital Beltway, I-495, and the two legs of I-270. There are several ways to get there.

- Proceed on Old Georgetown Road from the intersection of Wisconsin Avenue and East-West Highway, MD Route 410 for about 2/3 mile past the Beltway and turn left onto Democracy Boulevard. After one long block, take the first left turn, onto Bells Mill Road and then left into the library parking lot,
- From the outer loop of the Beltway, bear right onto the I-270 leg. Take the first exit, Old Georgetown Road. Turn left at the light at the top of the exit ramp, go south ½ mile or less, turn right onto Democracy, and proceed as above.
- From the inner loop of the Beltway bear right on RTE 495 where the I-270 leg splits off to the left, then take the first exit, Old Georgetown Road, and go north to Democracy,

- From I-270 South, bear left onto one I-270 leg and take the Old Georgetown Road exit and go south to Democracy.

### **Events:**

**April 7** - Spring Wild Food Tasting. An annual event that consists of the cooking of wild foods that are prevalent in the early spring (possibly a few morel dishes). 15 to 20 dishes prepared by MAW members. You must be or become a member to attend. See details below.

**May 5** - Susan Hopkins will present a program on the use of fungi for textile dyes. This will include some practical demonstrations.

**May 30 - May 31** - Patuxent River BioBlitz. See details below.

**June 2** - Joe Lankalis will present a program on illuminated fungi. The presentation will address the cause of fungal photoluminescence and the theoretical basis.

**July 7** - Sean Westmoreland, a graduate student working with Tom Volk at the University of Wisconsin will give presentation on toothed fungi.

**August 4** - (tentative) Britt Bunyard, the editor of Fungi Magazine will be the principle speaker.

**TBD** Annual West Virginia foray weekend at Lost River, West Virginia

**September 1** - Program TBD

**September 12 -14** - Annual MAW foray at **Camp Sequanota** in Jennerstown, PA. A weekend stay at the Lutheran Camp including all

meals and daily forays.

**September 24 - 27** Regional Foray Wildacres, North Carolina. Contact Bruce Boyer for details.

**October 4** - The Annual MAW **Mushroom Fair** will be held at the Brookside Gardens Visitors' Center

**October 6** - Annual MAW's Wild Mushroom Culinary Event. 15 - 20 wild mushroom dishes prepared by MAW members. You must be or become a member to attend

**October 15 - 18** - NEMF (Northeast Mycological Federation) Foray, Cape Cod, Massachusetts

**November 3** - Nominations for MAW Board for 2010. Program TBD

**November 26 - 29** - NAMA (North American Mycological Association) Foray, Lafayette, Louisiana.

**December 1** - Election for MAW Board for 2010. Panel discussion the fungal year in review.



## **Spring Tasting Meeting**

On **April 7<sup>th</sup>** at the Davis Public Library, MAW will hold the first of two annual meetings dedicated to the inimitable art of mushroom cooking. To attend this event, it is necessary to become a member of MAW in order to meet statutory requirements concerning the food preparation in public forums. The following

admission policy will be strictly enforced:

1. Only members of MAW will be admitted to Tasting Meetings.
2. Members who provide either a dish containing mushrooms, or wild mushrooms for others to prepare at the Tasting Meeting pay nothing. The dish must be able to allow 40 people hors d'oeuvre sized portions.
3. Members who do not provide either a dish containing mushrooms or wild mushrooms for others to prepare must pay a fee of \$10.
4. Non-members must join MAW at the door and pay the applicable current year's membership dues but no \$10 fee.
5. Former members who have not yet paid dues for the current year but who were members in good standing last year must pay this year's dues and either provide a dish containing mushrooms or wild mushrooms for others to prepare or pay the \$10 fee.
6. Former members who have not paid dues for more than just the current year must pay dues for the current year but not an additional \$10 and will be treated as new members.
7. All new members who join at the Fall Tasting Meeting will be paid up through the *following* year.

- Registration forms must accompany your dish and are available at our website [mawdc.org](http://mawdc.org). Please print out and fill out completely.
- Please arrive by 6:00 with all items that you will need to prepare your dish (food items,

pan, knives, spatula etc.). We will have 8 burners available for your use.

- Please email me letting me know what you plan to bring. Remember, all mushrooms to be cooked / consumed must first be identified and approved by either Jon, Ray, or Mitch.
- Please remember to bring your recipe. Having that information available is useful for those with dietary restrictions.
- We could use folding tables. Please let me know if you are able to loan us one (or more).
- Any volunteers, assistance, ideas, or suggestions are welcome. Email me at [culinary@mawdc.org](mailto:culinary@mawdc.org)

In order to promote the fine art of mycophagy, it is necessary to share our recipes in order that we may share our gustatory experiences. To that end, a simple recipe is included below. It will be the future intent of this section to provide the best recipe from the tasting meetings in addition to any others that are submitted to the Culinary Chair (Alan Remchuk) for inclusion in the newsletter.

## **Sherry with Mushrooms**

### Ingredients

8 ounces of sliced mushrooms  
1/3 cup dry sherry  
2 teaspoons butter  
Pinch of marjoram  
Salt & pepper

- Melt butter in saucepan over medium heat.

- Stir in mushrooms and stir until evenly coated
- Add salt and pepper to taste
- When mushrooms start to become soft (pliable with a fork), add sherry and marjoram.
- Stir until most of the liquid has evaporated

## **Bioblitz Patuxent River Park**

A bioblitz is a 24 hour period during which teams of scientists from diverse disciplines identify all of the flora and fauna in a specified area. From noon on Saturday, May 30 until noon on Sunday, May 31, the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission and the Patuxent River Park Staff are sponsoring a bioblitz at the Jug Bay Natural Area at Patuxent River Park in Upper Marlboro, Maryland. Volunteers are needed in the field of mycology to collect and assist in the identification of fungi. For more information, contact Erica Hahn, Park Ranger at 301-203-6079 or [Erica.Hahn@pgparks.com](mailto:Erica.Hahn@pgparks.com).

## **FORAY SCHEDULE**

Mitch "Foray" Fournet



President Ray LaSala (left) with Foray Leader Mitch Fournet and *Hericium erinaceus* aka Satyr's Beard

Hello MAW members!

Mitch here to let you know what the foray schedule will look like for this year. I'm not used to planning the year this far in advance so there is definitely the possibility for changes throughout the year depending on conditions or other plans that may come up. So, if you are not on my e-mail list you may want to send me an e-mail(which can be found below) to be put on it. I send out a notification with all the pertinent information in it at least a few days before the scheduled foray. If you don't care to be on the list you can also check the voice mail system to find out if the foray has changed. The number is on the front of this newsletter is you have not seen it. Just go to mailbox 55.

Most forays start at 10:00 AM at the designated location and remember that it's against the rules to hunt in a designated foray location within 7 days of the scheduled foray.

If you would like to know what you need to do before a foray refer to the MAW web site at <http://mawdc.org> and go to the archive section. At the bottom of the foray page you will find a list of rules and items you can consider bringing along on the foray.

Well, I guess that enough info for now, on with the schedule.

**April 19<sup>th</sup>:** Wheaton Regional Park, Wheaton, VA

**April 25<sup>th</sup>:** Roundtree Park, Fairfax, VA

**April 26<sup>th</sup>:** Watkins Regional Park, Upper Marlboro, MD

**May 2<sup>nd</sup>:** Northern VA 4-H Center, Front Royal, VA

**May 3<sup>rd</sup>:** Skyline Drive, Front Royal, VA

**May 9<sup>th</sup>:** Possibly another trip to Front Royal

**May 16<sup>th</sup>:** Open slot just in case they are still hanging on(wishful thinking :)

**June 28<sup>th</sup>:** Chanterelle Lookout, Scott's Run Nature Preserve, , VA

**July 5<sup>th</sup>:** Rock Creek Pk. Chevy Chase, MD

**July 11<sup>th</sup>:**Lake Bernard Frank, , MD

**July 18<sup>th</sup>:** Lake Fairfax Park, Reston VA

**July 26<sup>th</sup>:** Greenbelt Park, Greenbelt, MD

**August 8<sup>th</sup>:** Cosca Regional Park, Clinton, MD

**August 30<sup>th</sup>:** Rockburn Branch Park, Elkridge, MD

**Sept 5<sup>th</sup>:** Seneca Creek State Park, Gaithersburg, MD

**Sept 19<sup>th</sup>:** Cabin John Regional Park, Rockville, MD

**Sept 27<sup>th</sup>:** Prince William Forest Park, Dumfries, VA

**Oct 3<sup>rd</sup>:** Multiple forays for the Mushroom Fair at Brookside Gardens

**Oct 17<sup>th</sup>:** Greenbelt Park, Greenbelt , MD

Feel free to contact me if you have any site recommendations or if you may be able to attend if we have a foray closer to your location. It's

always nice to try new spots. You can reach me at [forays@mawdc.org](mailto:forays@mawdc.org)  
Thanks and hope to see you out there.  
Happy Hunting!

## **Editorial**

### **Mushrooms with Sherry**

It occurred to me recently that I have never, in the eight years that I have been looking for mushrooms, found a morel on my own, i.e., I have never gone into a forest by myself or with Maria and had the experience of seeing a morel..

I have found morels (not many) but the morels that I have found I have found on MAW forays and on grounds proven to have morels because of the experience of MAW members in the past.

There is one exception to this and that is due to our neighbor, Peggy, who read a story about morels in the Baltimore Sun seven years ago and called Maria about her finding morels in a small section of her yard. Maria ran over to Peggy's yard with her son Tim and returned with 40 morels. Since then the harvest has dwindled to one to three a year.

The point is that I have found most of the mushrooms that one expects to find in this area and I found them without any help and I have found plenty of them, so it seems odd that I have never run into a morel when not on a MAW foray or without the help of a neighbor who doesn't like mushrooms.

I haven't asked others in the club about their morel experience, though I might. But I wonder if they have had the same morel experience. It

would explain why of all the mushrooms hunted, the morel is the one whose location is most guarded. (see cartoon) You just don't run into a morel on a casual walk in the park on a May morning.

Of the fabulous five: morels, chanterelles, hen, chicken and pleurotus, only chanterelles can be placed in the "difficult to find category" but I have found chanterelles without help, though I should say that I know of a number of places where they grow in abundance, only because of the kindness of others.

Here's a verse that I published a few years ago which may not help you find morels but it might help in talking about finding morels with Mitch, who will help you find them.

### **WE'RE GOING TO FIND MORELS**

We're going to find morels.  
We're out to find morels  
The Shenandoah and Watkins Park  
That's where we'll find morels.

We're looking for the ash  
The poplar will do too.  
Old orchards have been known in lore  
To give us bucketsful.

The redbuds are in bloom.  
The apple-may is high.  
It's springtime and the ground is soft  
That elm's about to die.

Let's find some sandy soil  
That runs along a brook  
And hope we have a nice long rain  
On days before we look.

At first we'll see a cup  
That has a scarlet hue,  
And next we'll see the false morel;  
The half will then be due.

And then we'll find the full morel;

The black will have its turn.  
And next we'll find the yellow one,  
All this we vaguely learn.

That's where we'll find morels;  
That's when we'll find morels.  
Let's slip away without a word  
We're going to find morels.



### **From the Sporophore Editor**

William Needham

As the 2009 Newsletter Editor, I wanted to first thank my predecessor, Jim Sherry, for all of his contributions. He has graciously agreed to continue in the tradition of providing inimitable commentary and a look on the lighter side of the mushroom patch with his trenchant cartoons (see Mushrooms with Sherry).

I have tried to rearrange the format so that each of the board members who represent an aspect of the MAW organization have a way to communicate with you the membership on a routine basis. This is, after all, the function of the newsletter. In addition, there will be an updated listing of all scheduled events for the upcoming year (to the extent that they are known) to facilitate planning.

If you have any suggestions, comments or contributions (i. e. articles you have written) please do not hesitate to let me know.

## Fungus Notebook



**Common Name:** **Tinder Polypore,** Tinder fungus, Touchwood, Punk, German tinder, Fire-starter mushroom, German felt, Hoof fungus, Surgeon's agaric, *Agaricus chirurgorum*, Amadou, *Amadou* (France), *Tsuriganetabe* (Japan), *Wundschwamm* (Germany), *Esporija pare heridas* (Italy)- The preponderant references to tinder correspond to the widespread use of the fungus for fire initiation and fire maintenance.

**Scientific Name:** *Fomes fomentarius* - The Latin word *fomes* means "tinder" or "touchwood" and the Latin word *fomentarius* means "material to feed a fire" - both the generic and species names emphasize the use of the fungus for fires. Formerly known as *Polyporus fomentarius* and *Ungulina fomentarius*.

The Tinder Polypore is one of the most readily identifiable of the bracket fungi, which means it is laterally attached like a bracket to a substrate without a supporting stalk. The shape and proportions are suggestive of a horse's hoof; the common name hoof fungus provides a descriptive mnemonic. The tinder polypore is weakly parasitic on broad-leaved trees, notably beech and birch. The pathogenic infection is

known as white heart-rot: the disintegration (rot) of the central wood of the tree (heart) through consumption of the brown lignin so that only the cellulose which is generally light in color (white) remains. The fungus is also saprobic, living on the dead trunk or remnant stump of the tree that it may or may not have had a hand in killing. The "hoof" portion of the fungus has a crusty grey-brown, zoned upper surface, the bottom is comprised of a cream-colored surface that is covered with pores that are about a third of a millimeter in diameter. Spores are produced in prodigious numbers in the spring and summer, as many as 800 million in a single hour according to field testing; very few spores are produced in the autumn and winter.

The many common names of *F. fomentarius* in numerous languages reflect a global cultural association and a wide range of practical applications; its use as a means to start a fire as tinder is probably of greatest notoriety. The historical and ancient method of "German tinder" preparation was to remove the hard outer rind of the fungus and cut the softer, fibrous interior flesh into strips that were placed in a pot filled with enough urine for submersion. Saltpeter (potassium nitrate) can be substituted as a chemical alternative to urine in more modern applications. The urine-fungus concoction was then boiled for several days with the periodic addition of urine. At the completion of the process, the fungus was removed, drained and dried; the resultant admixture had combustive properties that made it exceptionally well suited for use as touchwood to start a fire. The common name Amadou is a calque from *Amadou*,

the French name for the fungus which means to coax or cajole. It may be presumed that this etymological association arose from the use of the Amadou to coax a fire along when first started. The slow-burning properties of the tinder fungus also provided a critical means of fire transport from one camp location to another. E. Schaechter relates in the book "In the Company of Mushrooms" that the Atabaskan people of Alaska called the fungus "growth from a tree" and used it to transport a fire from one location to another as did the Cree Indians of Northern Quebec. The common name punk attests to the use of the tinder fungus as a means of maintaining a lighted ember. According to Paul Stamets in "Mycomedicinals," punk became popular in the Middle Ages with the spread of the flintlock rifle which used the spark from a flint to ignite the fungal punk which provided adequate amplification to ignite the gunpowder and discharge the weapon. In the halcyon days of yore when firecrackers were legal and relatively plentiful, punk was a very effective ignition implement.

*F. fomentarius* was also widely used as a styptic to stop bleeding and as a vulnerary to treat wounds. This practice dates to Hippocrates of Cos (460 - 370 BCE), the Greek physician who, as the "father of medicine" was the progenitor of the notion that illness was the result of an imbalance among the four humors of blood, black bile, yellow bile and phlegm. The "Hippocratic Corpus" is a body of works attributed to both Hippocrates and his students which contains the prescriptive: "...if the pain settles somewhere else, cauterize: burn fleshy parts with irons, osseous and fibrous ones with fungi." In the absence of any linking

common or scientific names, the use of the tinder fungus is presumed. The styptic function is evident in the various references to this application in the common names in several languages. The German *Wundschwamm* literally means "wound sponge" and the Italian *Esporija pare heridas* means "sponge for the wound." In English, the fungus is also known as Surgeon's agaric and *Agaricus chirurgorum*. The agaric name comes from the Greek *Agarikon*, which means fungus - the fungi of the genus *Fomes* were frequently referred to as agarics, particularly when used in the manufacture of punk. A surgeon is an earlier form of the word surgeon; the Latin surgery is *chirurgia*. The styptic function is a testimonial to the water absorbing properties of the tinder polypore. The common name German felt refers to the kneading of the tinder fungus inner flesh into a felt-like fabric used to make water-resistant hats. It is still in use for its water absorbent properties today. Amadou pouches are sold to fisherman for the storage of artificial flies; the fungus draws the moisture from the fly to restore the evanescence necessary to allure piscine predators.

The salubrious use of the Surgeon's agaric for staunching wounds was doubtless enhanced by its attendant medicinal benefits. Numerous modern researchers have demonstrated that *F. fomentarius* has anti-tumor and antibacterial properties, attributed to iodine and to a substance aptly named fomentariol. It was used by a number of Native American tribes to treat arthritis, by the healers of ancient China as a cancer medicine, and by the peoples of South Asia as a diuretic and laxative. The Native Americans of

Siberia used it in powdered form as a snuff-like nasal inhalant. It is even reported to be one of the better palliatives for an ingrown toenail, strips of the velvety felt being placed between the toes.

The widespread use of the tinder polypore in ancient times was a matter of historical conjecture until 1991 when it was affirmed with archaeological certainty; Austrian hikers found a frozen corpse half emerged from the Schnalstal Glacier in the Tyrolean Alps.



The hapless wayfarer was thought to be of relatively recent mortality and was taken to Innsbruck, Austria for investigation. It was quickly determined based on the artifacts found with him that he was of much older provenance - a 5000 year old Neolithic European who lived during the Copper Age. He was christened Oetzi or Ötzi for the region of Italy adjacent to the alpine pass of his demise. His death was attributed to exposure. In 1998, careful geographic coordinates of his bier confirmed that he was actually found in Italy; Oetzi was accordingly moved to the South Tyrol Museum of

Archaeology in Bolzano, Italy, where he is on display in a specially refrigerated catafalque. The Italians conducted an independent inspection and found that he had an arrowhead lodged in his back, a much more plausible cause of death. Among his many accoutrements was a pouch containing tinder polypore fragments along with several small sharpened flint stones. It is not known if the fungus was used to treat wounds or as a means to transport and start fires, possibly both. The contents of the pouch are preserved on display there with the mummified remains of "the iceman." (Photograph of Oetzi from The South Tyrol Museum of Archaeology).

## **Final Thoughts**

As our ability to decipher the mysteries of life becomes manifest in the unraveling of the DNA template, it is important to retain a sense of wonder in its intricate complexity. The fungi are perhaps the best example of this. They permeate the ground and complete the cycle of growth and decay that they themselves have helped create in mycorrhizal associations. The taxonomies of the past are not likely to provide a full set of directions to the clades of the future any more than Adam can have evoked Eve. Perhaps that is why those of us who see the fungi as allies to be studied, appreciated and enjoyed and not toadstools to be vilified consider ourselves uniquely grounded in the science of life. And as we think of Ötzi carrying the tinder fungus on his last journey to the Alpine summit, we can only hope to understand what his life must have been and what ours may be in the future.

