

Traditions of Using Medicinal Mushrooms Among the Nations of the World

Nina P. Denisova

V. L. Komarov Botanical Institute, Russian Academy of Sciences, 2 Prof. Popov Str., St. Petersburg 197376, Russia

During the 20th century mycological science and the mushroom industry were highly developed, providing, to some extent, the primary needs for nutritive protein and medicinal agents. But the rich, ancient traditions of using medicinal mushrooms are underestimated still as essential criteria for search and selection of mushroom species as possible producers of drugs. Studies of the folklore and traditions of using medicinal mushrooms among the various ethnic groups of the world can lead to disclosure of species with explicit therapeutic effects.

At present myriad species of basidial mushrooms are determined. About 700 of them are edible, and more than 300 species demonstrate pronounced therapeutic effects. But only an infinitesimal number of edible and medicinal mushrooms are used by people.

The distribution and preference in using mushrooms among different countries and continents have been irregular from very ancient times up to now. We tried to systematize a great deal of information on healing features of mushrooms

that were traditionally used in Oriental popular medicine (generally Chinese and Japanese), and also in West and East European living (including scarce historical data on Russian remedial experiences). For Oriental popular medicine about 200 species were selected, and for European (including old Russian), about 40. Only about 30 species were the same for these two regions.

As a result, mushrooms with healing effects were collected and grouped according to categorized complaints that could be cured. There were 54 species with antitumor features; 16 species were successful against urinogenital diseases; 14 against pulmonary diseases; 13 against gastrointestinal disturbances; and the remaining 32 species against hypertension, diabetes, dermatitis, laryngitis, eye diseases; and also as aphrodisiacs, vermifuges, and so forth.

Historical data show that medicinal mushrooms have good prospects as producers of remedies, biologically active compounds, tonics, and restorative fortified food.