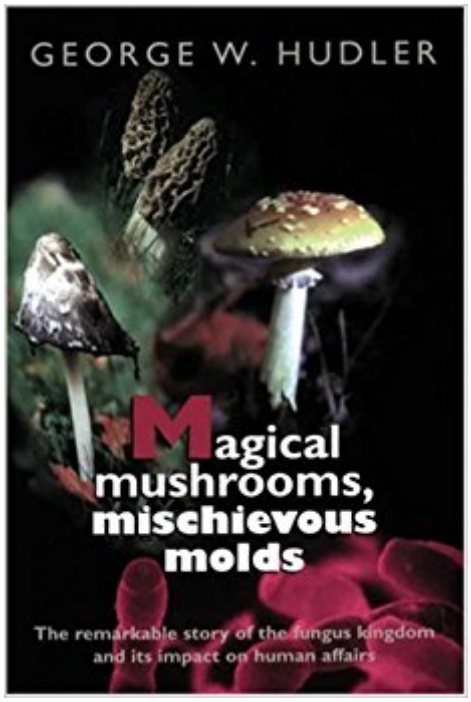
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Magical Mushrooms, Mischievous Molds



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Synopsis

Mushrooms magically spew forth from the earth in the hours that follow a summer rain. Fuzzy brown molds mischievously turn forgotten peaches to slime in the kitchen fruit bowl. And in thousands of other ways, members of the kingdom Fungi do their part to make life on Earth the miracle that it is. In this lively book, George Hudler leads us on a tour of an often-overlooked group of organisms, which differ radically from both animals and plants. Along the way the author stops to ponder the marvels of nature and the impact of mere microbes on the evolution of civilization. Nature’s ultimate recyclers not only save us from drowning in a sea of organic waste, but also provide us with food, drink, and a wide array of valuable medicines and industrial chemicals. Some fungi make deadly poisons and psychedelic drugs that have interesting histories in and of themselves, and Hudler weaves tales of those into his scientific account of the nature of the fungi. The role of fungi in the Irish potato famine, in the Salem Witch Trials, in the philosophical writings of Greek scholars, and in the creation of ginger snaps are just a few of the many great moments in history to grace these pages. Hudler moves so easily from discussing human history to exploring scientific knowledge, all with a sense of humor and enthusiasm, that one can well understand why he is an award-winning teacher both at Cornell University as well as nationally. Few, for instance, who read his invitation to "get out of your chair and take a short walk" will ever again look without curiosity and admiration at the "rotten" part of the world around them. Magical Mushrooms, Mischievous Molds is full of information that will satisfy history buffs, science enthusiasts, and anyone interested in nature’s miracles. Everyone in Hudler’s audience will develop a new appreciation of the debt they owe to the molds for such common products as penicillin, wine, and bread.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Oh, to be young and eligible to enroll in Professor George Hudler's "Plant Pathology 101" class at Cornell! For those of us who aren't, this book is the next best thing--a hugely entertaining introduction to spore lore. Not only does he bring us up to speed on the fungus science, he relates the amazing impact of his branch of science on human history. The Eleusinian Mysteries that so inspired Plato and Sophocles were probably caused by ergot, which Tim Leary and the CIA put to scarier use in its refined form, LSD. Other fungal products are more upbeat: penicillin (Hudler tells a good story about British scientists who put its spores on their clothes in 1940, to preserve their research in case Germany invaded), cyclosporins, which permit such organ recipients as David Crosby not to reject their healthy new livers, and Beano, a derivative of alpha-d-galactosidase that suppresses flatulence in humans. Want to commit the perfect murder? Try aflatoxin, as a Graham Greene character does in The Human Factor. Do you dare to recreate the hallucinations of the Salem witches? Ergot's just the thing, as characters discover to their misfortune in Robin Cook's thriller Acceptable Risk. Hudler packs plenty of intriguing stories into a brief, readable book: exploding artillery fungus, spores spread by earthquakes that can cause anorexia, a 35-acre spread of 1,500-year-old identical mushrooms in Michigan that may be the oldest, biggest living thing on Earth. No question about it--Dr. Hudler is one fun guy. --Tim Appelo

While most people might not think mushrooms and molds to be fascinating creatures, Hudler, professor of plant pathology at Cornell University, does a remarkable job proving them wrong. In this thoroughly entertaining book, he demonstrates that fungi are much more than slimy, disgusting, disease-causing organisms; in fact, they have dramatically influenced the course of human history. With chapters on yeasts used to make bread and to brew alcoholic beverages, on the medicinal uses of fungi from penicillin to possible treatments for AIDS, on edible mushrooms like the common button mushroom and the more exotic truffle, and on hallucinogenic mushrooms, Hudler takes readers on an enthralling and informative tour of this much maligned kingdom. Fungi do have a downside and Hudler doesn't gloss over their ill effects, discussing the havoc arising from the failure of the Irish potato crop (caused by Phytophthora infestans) and the misery and starvation attributable to ergot (Claviceps purpurea) contamination of grains, including, likely, the events

associated with the Salem witch trials. He also covers a host of fungi-involved human diseases, from athlete’s foot to yeast infections and histoplasmosis. Hudler even explains that chemicals in ergot, when ingested, can lead to formication, or "a sensation of ants crawling over the body." With a chapter providing advice for those interested in collecting wild mushrooms, there’s something in this wonderful volume for just about every taste. Illustrations not seen by PW. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Fungi are among the least understood and often most maligned organisms. The cast is huge and runs the gamut from ergot of rye through food plant pathogens, human and animal pathogens, molds, yeasts, mushrooms and rot fungi. All have complicated life cycles and are often only noticed when the put up fruiting bodies (as in mushrooms). While mushrooms have a certain following, most other fungi are not especially well liked. This is a bit of a pity, as many are quite interesting and some serve important functions from even our point of view.George W. Hudler, a professor of plant pathology at Cornell University, has produced in "Magical Mushrooms. Mischievous Molds" a solid and well illustrated review of these important, but often ignored, life forms that should intrigue even those who find fungi boring. This well-written book certainly is an easy read and provides numerous fascinating facts about the fungus world. From the effects of ergot and hallucinogenic mushrooms to the tree death-dealing Dutch elm disease and fermenting yeasts, Hudler covers the field with a thoroughness not usually seen in a book of this size.There have been several very good books on fungi in recent years, most involving mushrooms, but Hudler, has I think, written the best of all. A fascinating read and I recommend it highly!

fantastic resource

This book has been both highly informative (for example, I know so much more about the history of ergot in grain crops than I would have imagined), and incredibly entertaining (who’d have thought ergot could be so gripping??)! I highly recommend this book for any mushroom enthusiast, and for everyone else as well, it’s definitely a must-read.

The book was in excellent condition and it was mailed promptly. It was also packaged well.Thank you again for this lovely text at such a nice price.

this book was recomended by Tom Volk, UW LaCrosse. I haven’t finished it. A must for mycologists

meandering more mindfully.

I can’t usually tell people how good a science book can be, but this one I’ve recommended to many people of many interests.

Very well. I have never owned an actual bread product before but since I have started making my own bread, none of the knives I had were long enough to do a good job so I ordered this one. It is amazing. It’s long enough for any loaf you may need it for and absolutely no difficulty is creating a smooth, even slice of bread. I would recommend it to anyone who is thinking of getting a good bread product. my husband think it is amazing , tell a lot of the product . excellent.

In the lull after the holidays, I picked up, for light reading, Dr. George Hudler’s Magical Mushrooms, Mischievous Molds.You may question my correlating a book about fungus and light reading. Trust me it is informative and very interesting. There is a minimum of technical terminology. It is the text for a course Dr. Hudler teaches at The University. The course is one of the most popular on campus. It received national recognition for its popularity. It is a course, student rumor relates, that will not strain their brain too much. The book is similar.Several chapters are devoted to pathogens of plants (food crops, grains and trees). Edible, poisonous and hallucinogenic mushrooms have chapters that repeatedly warn that less than a positive mushroom identification is life threatening. Fungus helping us medicinally, and with our foods (bread, wine & beer) are also discussed.Did you know it is a fungal halo surrounding that dead fly stuck to the widow? Dr. Hudler relates fungal postulates responsible for the witch trials in colonial Salem Massachusetts. He also relates that the Egyptian famine described in the 41st chapter of Genesis was very likely caused by a rust disease that destroyed the grain crops. Late blight fungus caused the Irish potato famine and challenges potato and tomato growers today. I was unaware that thieves stealing the grape crop in 19th century France lead to the discovery of a cure for powdery mildew. In this case, the vineyard owner sprayed a mixture of lime and copper on the plants to discourage freeloading harvesters. It was the first recorded use of `Bordeaux mixture’.Descriptions of fungal sex and spore dispersal are included in the `how they do it’ chapter. Dr. Hudler’s course is even higher on my to-do list now.

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