

Featured Mushroom Dec 2022

*Clitocybe odora* (Aniseed Clitocybe)

By Dave Layton



I chose *Clitocybe odora* (Aniseed Clitocybe) in part because of its lovely holiday colors of green and white that are tailor made for this December post. Jim Frink captured these colors perfectly in his photos of *C. odora* in their early growth. More of Jim's amazing photos are available on this website. You can also view a great PBS documentary segment on Jim and his art at this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M1Y24HwEkjM>.

The Aniseed Clitocybe is so named *odora* because of its fragrant anise-like odor. The green color of young caps and unique fragrance make this one of the easiest Clitocybes to identify. Plus, it fruits in July before many other mushrooms are present and all the way into fall. Even better, it's often abundant around here. All of the older books list this species as edible and that may be my problem.

I've harvested and eaten these mushrooms since the 1970s. I found that they have an aniseed flavor as well as fragrance, which goes particularly well with the herbs in spaghetti sauce. However in recent years with the advent of DNA sequencing, it has been learned that this species (like so many mushroom species) is more complex and variable than originally thought, and its wholesomeness is being questioned more often. Apparently there have even been reports of muscarine in some collections.

Some years ago a friend became ill after eating my spaghetti sauce. I blamed American parasol mushrooms (*Leucoagaricus americana*) that were in it, for I'd just read reports that some people are allergic to that species. Recently I came across a photo of the mushrooms that went into that sauce. *C. odora* was present also - hmm.

This fall, I made a sauce with *C. odora*, oysters, hens and blewits. I had a mild digestive issue after eating. Could it have been the Clitocybe? On a brighter note *C. odora* may well have cancer-inhibiting properties as evidenced from tests with mice. So the question is: do I continue to be a lab rat myself or move *C. odora* to the pretty to look at and smell only category?

Dave

