



Marasmius oreades, photo by D. Borgarino. Used with permission.

Marasmius oreades July/August Featured mushroom

I first learned how easy it is to make mistakes identifying mushrooms when I tried to make a meal with what I thought were fairy ring mushrooms (*Marasmius oreades*). The mushrooms I picked seemed right with cream colored gills, long tough stem and growing on grass in early summer. They looked pretty darn close to the picture of *M. oreades* in the one old library book I had at the time. Well maybe they were a little yellower but photo coloration in those old books was never that good. Plus the cap was a little flatter shaped and gills seemed closer together than described, but, hey, that's all subjective. *M. oreades* was the closest thing in that book to the mushrooms I had, so I went ahead and threw some in an omelet. I spit out the first mushroom I tasted. I didn't know what those mushrooms were but I knew they weren't delicious like the book claimed. I went back to the library and checked out all of its mushroom books. I realized there were hundreds of mushrooms that weren't in that first book. Moreover, I read a few of those books from cover to cover. I learned some of the terminology and learned how naïve I was. It wasn't long before I found out that I had collected *Agrocybe pediades* (see photo below). It was obvious when the more mature specimens I later found had rust colored gills. Fortunately *A. pediades* is considered nonpoisonous, not that I was about to swallow anything that yucky tasting anyway.

The good news was that it wasn't long before I found the real *M. oreades* with their flesh colored bonnet shaped caps, broadly spaced cream colored gills (even in mature specimens), and unmistakably delicious flavor. Since then they've been a staple mushroom in almost every recipe I use mushrooms in. They fruit in abundance nearly every year, plus they have multiple seasons spring summer and fall. Best of all they're easy to spot in rings of dark green grass on lawns and parks and pastures. I later learned that *M.*

oreades actually shares habitat and growing season with a number of mushrooms including poisonous *Clitocybe dealbata* and inedible *Panaeolus foenscii*.

I still had one more lesson to learn about harvesting urban mushrooms though. A batch I harvested from a suburban lawn didn't taste quite right. I returned and saw the owner spraying the ring, hoping to rid his lawn of those nuisance toadstools. Actually spraying just fosters their growth because their relationship to grass is mychorizial not competitive. So I made note to self. Make sure not to harvest mushrooms from chemically treated lawns. That's okay though; there are plenty of safe places to harvest those little yummys.

Dave Layton

