Walking in the forest

Forests are priceless components of the environment and serve many functions. Primarily, they form and protect natural resources. Through the process of photosynthesis, forests renew the atmosphere's oxygen supply by absorbing atmospheric carbon dioxide and moderating the greenhouse effect. Forests provide a habitat for many species of plants and animals, thus protecting and sustaining the diversity of nature. Forests clean the environment by muffling noises, buffering strong winds and stopping dust and gases. They help regulate surface water runoff and prevent soil erosion. Forests are also popular areas for relaxation and recreation.

In recent years, due to the widespread destruction of nature, the ecological value of forests has increased immeasurably. The conservation of forest ecosystems is therefore one of the major challenges facing current and future generations. When walking in the forest, you can minimise your environmental impact by following some simple guidelines:

Use established trails, and walk in small groups.
Avoid fragile areas, particularly wetlands and unstable slopes.

Stop to rest only in areas where your presence will not damage vegetation.

Camp only in appropriate areas, preferably on marked campsites.

Learn about indigenous animals and avoid disturbing them.
Do not continue to approach animals after they become aware of your presence.
Let animals eat their natural foods. Giving them human food can disturb their diets and behaviour.

Use fire responsibly. Let your fire burn down to white ash and allow it to cool completely before you leave it.

Do all washing at least 100 metres from the nearest water source.
Minimise the use of soap.

Dispose of waste and wastewater appropriately.
Take your rubbish home with you.

Refrain from picking flowers.

Using mushrooms safely

Mushrooms are unique products of nature. They have been an important component of peasant dishes for centuries and remain a favourite treat for many people to this day. In addition to being consumed raw, mushrooms can be tinned, dried, pickled, frozen, baked, steamed, fried, boiled and stewed. The most popular ways of storing mushrooms – by drying or salting – help to preserve the nutrients and medicinal qualities that would otherwise be lost in cooking. But mushrooms have other important qualities in addition to their nutritional value. Mushrooms help decompose waste, enrich the ground with mineral salts, and are also used in the manufacturing of pharmaceutical drugs.

What do mushrooms contain?

Mushrooms contain water, fibre, minerals, vitamins (E, C, A, D and B group), proteins, macronutrients and micronutrients. The potassium in mushrooms helps to reduce blood pressure and lowers the risk of strokes. The protein content of dried mushrooms exceeds that of meat dishes. But perhaps the most useful component for the human organism is lecithin, which prevents the deposition of cholesterol. The fatty acids in fungi are easily digested, so they are a reliable aid against atherosclerosis. Mushrooms are also rich in natural insulin.

Benefits of mushrooms

The regular consumption of mushrooms reduces the risk of prostate cancer and other types of cancer, is effective in preventing diabetes, is helpful against atherosclerosis, and helps to lower the blood pressure. In ancient times, mushrooms were used to treat colds and flu because their constituent components have a stimulating effect on the immune system. We are more familiar today with the ability of mushrooms to protect the human body against infection and ulcers, and to help normalise pancreas and liver functions.

Popular mushrooms

Cep, or porcino mushrooms

Naturally effective against cancer, they also relieve migraine headaches, strengthen the heart muscles and stimulate mental abilities. These mushrooms are best eaten in dried or powder form.

Chanterelle mushrooms

As well as being highly effective against intestinal parasites, chanterelles can be used to treat abrasions, boils and sore throats due to the presence of natural antibiotics.

Red pine mushrooms
These mushrooms have a restorative effect on the body and also act as a catalyst that increases the effect of medication, helping people to recover faster from illness.

Honey fungi
These fungi can be taken as a laxative, are strong anti-cancer and anti-viral agents, and are also effective in treating diseases of the blood.

Chaga mushrooms
Although these mushrooms grow on the trunks of many trees, the most useful for humans is birch fungus, which can be taken as a tincture or tea for its tonic effects, anti-neoplastic capacities and gastrointestinal benefits.

Slippery Jack mushrooms
With their good tonic effect on the body, these mushrooms help to ward off colds, and alleviate gout and migraines.

Mushroom hazards

Although mushrooms have many benefits, some may be harmful. Dangers arise when a person is unable to distinguish between edible and inedible mushrooms, including freshly picked mushrooms that are sold on the market. Problems also occur when there is a lack of information on the impact of human activities on the biochemical composition of mushrooms.

Overripe, wormy and soft mushrooms are not suitable for eating and can cause gastrointestinal symptoms. Reports of mushroom poisoning are constantly growing in number. There are roughly 20 species of mushroom that are especially dangerous for humans, including the pale toadstool, fly agaric and other types of toadstools, false morels (*Gyromitra esculenta*), honey agaric, saddle fungus, sulphur tuft, puffballs, yellow-staining mushrooms, dark scaled mushrooms, and blood-red boletus. Some mushrooms can also become toxic if not properly cooked.

Don't forget!

- Mushrooms should be processed or eaten as soon as possible after picking.
- Mushrooms can be refrigerated for up to 24 hours after picking, but no longer.
- Storing mushrooms in plastic bags accelerates the process of decay; the absence of air and the presence of moisture allows the formation of harmful substances.
- Mushrooms are best kept in the refrigerator in an enamel or earthenware container.
- It is best not to collect mushrooms near major highways, military ranges, chemical plants, ecological disaster areas and areas at risk from radiation, as mushrooms can accumulate toxic substances from these environments.