LAKEHEAD REGION
CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

WILD MUSHROOMS

MILLS BLOCK FOREST MANAGEMENT PROPERTY

Have you ever wondered what exactly a mushroom is, and when you find one, what kind it is? Let's dig in to some of the basics of Wild Mushrooms here at Mills Block.

Mushrooms are the spore-bearing and fleshy fruiting bodies of fungus.

They are what is called **ephemeral,** which means temporary, or only present for a period of time, when environmental conditions are just right.

They produce millions of **spores** on their gills, pores, tubes or teeth which are then released by gravity and dispersed by air currents.

They are **found on their food** such as plant material in soil, wood or wood debris, or scat and located mostly above ground.

All fungi are **heterotrophic**, which means they feed on other organisms and are known as decomposers.

So, how exactly do they **decompose**? Well, when those spores land on the right substrate they will germinate and produce little vegetative filaments called **hyphae**. Those hyphae then secrete enzymes to break down the organic material into easily digested compounds.

Although the common image of a mushroom is typically illustrated by the toadstool with a stem growing out of the ground and topped by a sphere shaped bulb there are other types of mushrooms that vary from this image such as puff balls, agarics and morels.

There are **many different species** of mushrooms in the Lakehead Region with some of the more common species being; Fairy ring mushrooms, Birch polypore, Tinder Conk, Fly Agaric (poisonous), Lobster Mushroom, Chanterelles, Pear-Shaped and Giant puffballs, Shaggy Mane, Oyster Mushrooms, Black and Yellow Morels, King Bolete, Wood Hedgehog and Orange milkcap.

Be sure to **reference a field guide** or take a mushroom identification education tour to be sure you are harvesting only edible mushrooms. Less than 1% of all mushrooms are toxic but **illness and death can occur from eating the wrong one**. And remember, conservation areas can be used for identification and learning of mushrooms but not harvesting. As we say, take nothing but photographs, leave nothing but footprints to conserve for a better tomorrow.

The **benefits of eating mushrooms** include that they are a source of all essential amino acids, several B, D and E vitamins, potassium and phosphorus. They contain antioxidants, are a high source of protein, and are used in many traditional medicines.

Challenge:

Learning to identify the top 10 or so most common edible mushrooms in our area is a great way to start to get to know mushrooms. When you head out bring at least one field guide with you such as the " MUSHROOMS OF ONTARIO AND EASTERN CANADA" by George Barron with Lone Pine press.

Here is another fun activity you can do with mushrooms: **SPORE PRINTS**

Spore prints are the powdery residue that is left behind under fungi. They are often used to identify different types of mushrooms. You can make spore prints at home for some fun mushroom science!

HOW TO MAKE A SPORE PRINT:

Cut the stems off your mushrooms and spread them out on a piece of white paper with the gills (underside) facing down. Add a little water to the top of the mushroom by spritzing lightly with a spray bottle or use a paintbrush to apply.

Let your mushroom tops sit at least overnight. When your pull your mushroom top up you will see the unique prints it leaves behind