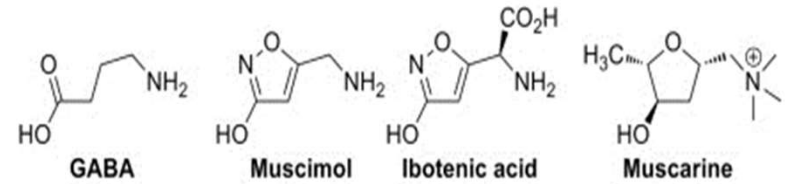


Plant of the Month

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History/Traditional Use

The psychoactive *Amanita* mushrooms, specifically *Amanita muscaria* and *Amanita pantherina*, have a well-attested entheogenic use among Siberian, European, and Pan-American shamanic peoples. In the days leading up to the winter solstice, the fly agaric mushroom appears under trees, mostly firs and spruces. In central Asia, shamans wore special garments to collect the fly agaric mushrooms in a special sack. During the ceremonial ritual, the shaman would consume and share the sacred mushrooms with the participants.



Amanita muscaria Fly Agaric

Pharmacology

Fly agaric has a long history of use as a sedative material and the main psychoactive compounds within these species are thought to be analogues of the neurotransmitter gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA) and glutamic acid, notably muscimol and ibotenic acid.

Fun Facts

- A side effect from eating fly agaric mushrooms was a rosy, red flush to the cheeks and face.
- Technically a species complex including several related taxa, the various forms each have a unique geographic range.

Chemistry

The decarboxylation of the often toxic ibotenic acid levels of some amanitas, which is largely achieved by drying the fruiting bodies, results in the production of muscimol, the desired nontoxic entheogenic compound.

Botany/Preparation

The cap of *Amanita muscaria* ranges from 10 to 20cm diameter at maturity; red or occasionally orange. Gills are white, free and crowded, turn pale yellow as the fruitbody matures. Stems are 10 to 25 cm long and 1.5 to 2cm in diameter; white and ragged with a grooved, hanging white ring. The swollen stem base retains the white remains of the sack-like volva, which eventually fragments into rings of scales around the base.



References

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