

# Leaflet

Your Connection to Nature  Medina County Park District

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Medina Gazette Edition

medinacountyparks.com  
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## Fungi, Friend, or Foe -- Why Mushrooms Matter

By: Nichole Schill, Naturalist

Mushrooms are often misunderstood, vilified, or overlooked entirely. If you're a careful observer, you may start to appreciate the variety of shapes and colors of mushrooms. A mushroom is a fruiting body of a fungus -- the part that produces spores. When a mushroom "pops up," it is, generally, when the environmental conditions are right for successful reproduction and often coincides with rainfall and moisture. The mushroom is a small part of the life cycle of a fungus but, often, the most easily observed and most helpful for identification. Fungi are distantly related to plants, animals, and bacteria. Like a plant, they have cell walls, but unlike a plant, they cannot make their own food or do photosynthesis. Like an animal, they can digest, grow, and reproduce but are immobile except through spore dispersal. These and other differences compound to result in fungi being classified in its own scientific kingdom.

Before you go kicking over the mushrooms in your lawn or growing out of a tree, consider what is growing beneath the surface. Much like an iceberg, there's more than meets the eye. There is a network of filamentous, hair-like fungi growth, called mycelium, growing in and through whatever it is eating. Digestive enzymes outside of the "body" break down their environments into nutrients they can consume. While some fungi are parasitic (feeding off of living tissue), they are, primarily, decomposers. This unseen mycelium serves an important ecosystem service because decomposition recycles dead "things" into valuable nutrients attainable for itself and other plants and animals.

### What good are mushrooms?

Some mushrooms form symbiotic relationships with trees, encasing or penetrating tree roots. Almost every tree benefits from this mutual relationship by receiving higher capacity of water absorptions and/or receiving hard-to-obtain nutrients like phosphorous and nitrogen. In return, the fungus receives carbohydrates from the tree.

In addition to eating mushrooms straight, fungi have been used in food preparation for centuries to leaven bread and ferment wine, beer, and soy sauce.

Many medical discoveries have come from fungi. Some examples: antibiotics (famously, penicillin); and treatments for malaria, diabetes, and cancers; and the anti-rejection drug (cyclosporin) for organ transplants.

Some enzymes for use in detergents are from fungi. There are human efforts to grow fungi as environmentally-friendly packing materials, "leather," biofuels, and bioremediation.

Fungi serve as a basic food source (or even shelter) for insects, slugs, mammals, turtles, etc. In no circumstance should you attempt to eat a mushroom in the wild that has not been thoroughly researched. However, seeing a mushroom in your yard should not incite panic. If mushrooms are growing in an area where an uninformed person, child, or pet could potentially eat them, it will, minimally, damage the fungi if you just remove and discard the mushroom. Overall, the beneficial species of fungi greatly outnumber the dangerous species. It is estimated only three percent of the millions of species worldwide are poisonous, and fewer, still, are human pathogens. The next time you see a mushroom, don't immediately try to destroy it. Appreciate it as organism that benefits people, animals, and plants and as a functioning ecosystem.



Back for its 16th year, Medina County Park District's popular annual hiking program offers participants the opportunity to enjoy

the splendor of the season and earn awards by completing at least eight designated hikes between September 1 and November 30.

To participate, pick up a Trekking Through Autumn form at Medina County Park District Headquarters, Oenslager Nature Center, or simply print one at [www.MedinaCountyParks.com](http://www.MedinaCountyParks.com). Check trails off the list as you complete them. When you've hiked eight or more, bring your completed form to Oenslager Nature Center by December 17 to claim your reward. Backpacks are awarded to first-year participants. Hiking pins are awarded in successive years. Awards are free for Medina County residents. Out-of-county residents pay \$10 for backpacks and \$3 for hiking pins. Pins are not available to first-year hikers.

## DONATION CORNER Tree of Life

*In Memory of Mary Jane Baytos*  
Duane and Linda Uhler

*In Memory of John Brenneman*  
Linda Ryder  
Nancy Boyer, Kristie, and Kerri  
Lowell and Lucie Nofziger  
Karen Stalter and Family  
F. Litwiller  
Marilyn Brenneman

*In Memory of Gordon Baker Phillips III*  
Dennis Repp

### Other

203 Acres in Westfield Twp./Westfield Ctr.  
Diane (Dedee) O'Neil

Assorted Fossils and Rock Samples  
Louise Melnik

Straw, Topsoil, and Mulch  
Anonymous

Painting  
Suzanne Hawley



September, October, and November programs  
are now online at [www.medinacountyparks.com](http://www.medinacountyparks.com).

## Several Employment Opportunities Available

Employment with the park district is more than a job -- it's an opportunity to make lives better in a fun, fulfilling team environment. Open positions include police officer, park planner, and park laborer. To learn more about these positions, go to [www.medinacountyparks.com](http://www.medinacountyparks.com), click on *About Us*, then on *Employment Opportunities*.



Purchase hats, hoodies, and more at  
[www.shopmedinacountyparks.com](http://www.shopmedinacountyparks.com).