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# American Botanical Council

## HerbClip

FILE: · Poison Deathcap Mushroom  
(*Amanita phalloides*)  
· Milk Thistle  
(*Silybum marianum*)

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Date: February 19, 1996

HC 2-19-6-3

TO: General Distribution

Re: **Milk Thistle Cited as Potential Remedy for  
Mushroom Poisoning**

Taylor, Michael. Girl Continues Recovery from Poison Mushrooms, *San Francisco Chronicle*, Feb. 10, 1996, pp. A15 and A19.

The accidental ingestion of deadly wild mushrooms is blamed in a series of recent poisonings in California. In one case, a girl whose family recently emigrated from Taiwan had to undergo a liver transplant as a result of eating poisonous mushrooms chopped and mixed into spaghetti sauce; she, her two brothers, and her mother, who also ingested the mushrooms, are improving. In another case, authorities in Sonoma County are investigating the death of Arturo Leyva-Sanchez, a 43-year-old ranch worker from rural Mexico; preliminary findings reveal that his death was probably caused by aminitin, a toxic substance found in *Amanita* mushrooms (*Amanita phalloides*).

According to herbal medicine experts, a European treatment called “silybinin” prepared from milk thistle seed extract (*Silybum marianum*) might have saved Leyva-Sanchez’s life and eased the sufferings of the other poisoning victims. Silybinin is used in Europe by doctors to fight liver disease caused by alcoholism, toxic chemicals, and poisonous mushrooms, but it is currently unavailable in the US. The German company Madaus Co. gave up trying to get approval to sell silybinin in the US as an orphan drug, requiring less testing than the conventional new drug application procedure, after learning of the extensive process required by the FDA for new drug testing. A pharmacist at the San Francisco Poison Control Center remarked, “...(A)s far as I know nothing has been proven [about the use of silybinin], and it’s not recommended”— indicating the lack of knowledge by health professionals in the US on well-researched European phytomedicines like milk thistle. Dr.

Andrew Weil disagrees: "You have nothing to lose by using it and there is good reason to think it can protect the liver cells from toxins." As for Leyva-Sanchez, if silibinin had been available to him immediately after ingestion of the poisonous mushrooms, "It might have saved his life."

The American Botanical Council supplied the *San Francisco Chronicle* extensive scientific and medicinal information for the research of this article. Milk thistle extract containing three flavonolignans collectively known as silymarin (which includes the compound silybinin), is readily available in the US as a dietary supplement. Ingestion of milk thistle extract *prior* to exposure to poisonous mushrooms can prevent adverse liver reactions. The isolated compound silybinin is not available in the US. In injectible form it is used in Germany as an emergency remedy for poison mushroom ingestion, if administered within 24-48 hours of exposure.