

# MUSTARDS AND PINKS

by Keith F. Best, Research Station, Swift Current

Pinks have always been favorites in civilized man's gardens, probably even before they were given their proud name of *Dianthus* (literally, "Jove's flower") by Theophrastus about 300 B.C. Many of our most beautiful garden flowers are included in the Caryophyllaceae or Pink Family among which are various species of catchfly (*Silene*, *Lychnis*), true pinks (*Dianthus*) and baby's-breath (*Gypsophila*). The most popular and widely grown of all pinks is probably the carnation or clove pink, (*Dianthus caryophyllus*) of which there are scores of varieties grown under glass by the commercial florists.

Cow cockle (*Saponaria vaccaria*), although considered to be a weed, is also a member of the Pink Family and is found in grain fields, waste places, roadsides and railway grades. Introduced from Eurpoe, this smooth, hairless annual grows from 1 to 2½ feet in height, with smooth, entire, clasping, grayish-green leaves, that are borne opposite each other in pairs on the stem. The flowers are showy, loosely grouped at the ends of the stems and have five pale red petals, while the sepals are united into an inflated, flask-like tube which is strongly 5-ribbed. The seeds are numerous, round and dull black with the surface roughened by many minute projections. The seeds, containing saporin, are poisonous to animals and are often found in "Wild Flower Garden" packets sold by seed houses.

One of the largest and most important families is that of the mustards. They are referred to as crucifers or cross-bearers because the corolla is made up in almost all cases of four petals borne in opposite pairs in a manner suggestive of a cross. Also, the mostly six stamens are arranged in a very distinctive pattern—four are longer than the remaining two. A number of important vegetables belong to this group, among



Hare's-ear Mustard

*Conringi orientalis*

them cabbage, brussel sprouts, kohlrabi, cauliflower, kale, broccoli, radish, turnip and horseradish. Our flower gardens contain many handsome crucifers from other parts of the world, cultivated for their handsome flowers, such as wall flowers, stock, rocket and sweet-alyssum.



Cow Cockle, *Saponaria vaccaria*

Just as interesting however, are some crucifers to which we apply the designation of weeds. The mustard family contains many plants admirably adapted to become weeds if given the opportunity of doing so.

Hare's-ear mustard (*Conringia orientalis*), an annual or winter annual growing up to a height of two feet, was introduced from Europe. The leaves are bluish-green, up to 5

inches long, alternate and clasping the stem with earlike basal lobes. The small, creamy-white flowers are borne at the end of the stems and ripen into long, narrow, 4-angled erect pods. The seeds are brownish with a distinctive white projection at the lower end, and may cause poisoning when fed in grain. The young plants have a whitish bloom and resemble cabbage seedlings.

## ARE YOU INTERESTED IN MUSHROOMS?

by **Connie B. Pratt**, 3136 Rae St., Regina

It is seldom that reports or photographs of fungi appear in the *Blue Jay*, and yet this is a subject that can become a fascinating study. Having begun myself to make a study of fungi, and particularly of the mushrooms, I want to appeal to other interested people to submit their observations to our magazine, which is intended to include many phases of natural history.

Mushrooms are of interest to us in many ways. To begin with, many people are interested in them as a source of food and in knowing which species are edible. Care should be taken when eating a new species of mushroom for the first time even when it is considered edible, for some species will make certain individuals ill while their companions enjoy the delicacy. Biologically speaking, one of the chief functions of the mushroom is to aid in the breakdown of dead organic material. Some trees cannot thrive without the presence of their fungus associates. Another interest in the mushrooms comes from scientists who are studying them as a possible source of antibiotic substances.

The great number of species that occur, the wide variety in form and colour, and the surprise of finding something different in the same locality under varying weather conditions add to the fascination of studying and photographing the mushrooms.

In identifying mushrooms I have found the following texts helpful:

J. Walton Groves, *Edible and poisonous mushrooms of Canada* (Queen's Printer, Ottawa. 1962. \$6.00.)

J. Walton Groves, *Mushroom collecting for beginners* (Canada Dept. of Agriculture, Publication 861, Ottawa. 1958. Free.)

Alexander H. Smith, *The Mushroom hunter's field guide*, (University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor. 1963. \$6.95.)



Photo by C. B. Pratt

Narrow-capped Morel (*Morchella angusticeps*). Ascomycetes. Edible. Woods along Hanson Lake Road, June, 1965.