



Psychedelic Renaissance

The new wave isn't about turning on and dropping out



Ground
shrooms

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● **The room** is warmly lit by decorative floor lamps and flickering candles. Fresh sunflowers beam out of vases placed on a nightstand next to a cozy bed. Relaxing music plays over the sound of a babbling brook. You feel safe, but also anxious, as a therapist hands you a blindfold, a glass of water and two capsules of psilocybin—the psychedelic compound in magic mushrooms. You put on the mask, swallow the capsules and lie back on the bed, visualizing a lush environment with a flowing creek as you wait for the psilocybin to kick in and a guided therapy session to ensue.

Major Breakthroughs

Psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy might seem like a pre-Drug War fantasy. But it's actually on its way to becoming a treatment option for people with severe depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies (MAPS), for instance, is about to enter the third phase of clinical trials testing the effects of MDMA on people with treatment-resistant PTSD. So far, the results have been staggering: those given MDMA (otherwise known as ecstasy or molly) in this double-blind randomized study no longer qualify as having the condition. As a result, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) now officially considers MDMA-assisted psychotherapy a "breakthrough therapy" for PTSD.

MDMA, or 3,4-Methylenedioxymethamphetamine, was originally synthesized in 1912 from saffrole, an oily liquid extracted from the root bark or fruit of the sassafras tree. But it wasn't until chemist Alexander Shulgin synthesized it again in the 1970s that it became all the rave in clubs around the world.

But MDMA isn't the only psychedelic being tested for its healing powers. There are also (at least) seven different studies and trials looking into the effects of psilocybin on everything from psychological distress in cancer patients to smoking cessation to major depressive disorder to our connection with nature. Like the MDMA trial, the results of the psilocybin studies have been eye-opening. In fact, psilocybin was also given breakthrough-therapy status for severe depression.

Unlike the MDMA trial, however, the psilocybin studies also happen to coincide with respective grassroots movements around the United States. Although different, they're all ultimately aiming for the same outcome: giving people the right to heal themselves outside the confines of Western medicine. This is the foundation on which the new-wave psychedelic movement is built and why this time around it's about more than just turning on, tuning in and dropping out.

The Future Is Psychedelic

It all started with Denver. Last May, the city made history by passing Ordinance 301, the Denver Psilocybin Mushroom Initiative. The measure effectively decriminalizes the possession, consumption and cultivation of magic mushrooms for adults over 21 within the city's jurisdiction.

Following Denver, another grassroots outfit known as Decriminalize Nature led a crusade in getting the city council in Oakland, California, to pass a resolution preventing the use of city funds to prosecute people for the possession or use of natural psychedelic plants (including ayahuasca and peyote) and fungi. There are now 100 cities across the United States looking to replicate Oakland's model.

There's also Decriminalize California, the campaign aiming for statewide psilocybin mushroom decriminalization. Legislation has been drafted to legalize and regulate psilocybin mushrooms for medical and therapeutic use, while decriminalizing the personal, spiritual, religious and dietary use and cultivation of fungi. Decriminalize California is currently gathering signatures to get on the 2020 ballot.

And then there's Oregon—a state with two major initiatives on the books. First there's the Oregon Psilocybin Service Initiative (PSI 2020), which aims to fully legalize psilocybin for therapists and other medical professionals. It does not decriminalize the use, consumption or cultivation of shrooms for those outside the medical field. But the Drug Policy Alliance is looking to decriminalize all drugs in the state—from psychedelics to opioids—under the Drug Addiction Treatment and Recovery Act (DATRA), which is currently petitioning for a spot on the ballot.

Why Not Just Legalize?

The majority of these measures involve decriminalizing mushrooms rather than fully legalizing them. But given the legalization of cannabis, why wouldn't we legalize psychedelics as well?

The short answer is that decriminalization activists in the psychedelic world hope to avoid what's happening with cannabis—commercialization, corporatization, over-regulation, for-profit models and exclusionary access. In short, the goal is to avoid "corporadelics." One way to do that, according to Ryan Munevar, the campaign director of Decriminalize California, is through ensuring access, quality and the right to grow your own.

"If you aren't allowed to produce your own (mushrooms), the market price will skyrocket," he says, noting that it costs \$900 to buy a pound of mushrooms

but under \$15 to grow your own. Munevar regularly hosts fungi cultivation classes to help spread this knowledge. “The Psilocybin Mushroom Bible: The Definitive Guide to Growing and Using Magic Mushrooms” by Virginia Haze and Dr. K. Mandrake is the main text recommended for this class.

Making this information available to the public, says Munevar, essentially strips corporate entities such as pharmaceutical companies of the power and motivation to come into this space. So not being penalized for possession, consumption and cultivation is essential for this model to work.

Decriminalization versus legalization has been a major point of contention within the world of psychedelics. But David Bronner, the CEO of renowned soap brand Dr. Bronner’s, has the bigger picture in mind. He’s donated funds supporting each initiative respectively—even the MDMA trials.

“These medicines are our allies,” says Bronner. “They are the key to healing ourselves and waking up and caring about all these problems we’re facing, including epidemic rates of depression and what’s going on in the environment.”

Not the Summer of Love

Bronner mentions that integrating psychedelics into the therapy model is crucial to helping our current mental health and addiction crises. That’s because in a two- to three-hour session, psychedelics break down internal barriers that traditional therapy generally takes a decade to penetrate. That’s why MDMA and psilocybin were given breakthrough-therapy status. These psycho-spiritual substances increase mental flexibility, allowing even the most difficult perspectives to be taken up for gentle consideration. They help you accept yourself—flaws and all.

It should be noted that consuming a psychedelic drug doesn’t just mean your depression or anxiety will instantly dissolve. It takes a lot of work to move through mental health issues, which is why your mindset heading into a psychedelic experience and the environment in which you trip—your “set and setting”—are key components to having a safe experience. Responsible tripping is a pillar of the psychedelic movement 2.0.

But the therapy model isn’t the only way in which people can heal with psychedelics. There’s also the ceremony model, which involves using a plant-based entheogen—a compound that alters consciousness, heightens empathy and often produces a “mystical” or spiritual experience—administered by a shamanic healer in a traditional indigenous environment. Neither is better than the other. It all depends on preference and how you integrate the insights you gain from your experience.

References

- For more on studies and using psilocybin mushrooms: **“Your Psilocybin Mushroom Companion”** by Michelle Janikian
- For reliable reporting on psychedelics: **Doubleblindmag.com**
- For more on the benefits of microdosing LSD: **“A Really Good Day”** by Ayelet Waldman
- For more on how psychedelics can change your mind (and thus the world): **“How to Change Your Mind”** by Michael Pollan
- For more on how to grow mushrooms: **“The Psilocybin Mushroom Bible”** by Virginia Haze and Dr. K. Mandrake
- For the latest research, free books and essays: **MAPS.org**

Psilocybin Ginger-Lime Chocolate Truffles


4 ounces dark chocolate, coarsely chopped
2¼ ounces crystallized ginger
Zest of ½ lime
1½ teaspoons fresh lime juice
6 grams dried shrooms, ground or blended to fine powder cornstarch

Melt chocolate in top of double boiler over gently simmering water.

In coffee grinder or small food processor, blitz ginger almost to a paste; add lime zest and juice and blend again. Transfer to small bowl; add powdered shrooms, mixing well. Lightly dust hands and work surface with cornstarch. On a piece of wax paper, shape mixture into long, thin log, and chill in freezer for 20 minutes. Cut into 12 pieces; roll each into smooth ball.

Roll balls in melted chocolate, coating fully. Transfer to parchment paper or silicon baking mat; refrigerate until fully set, at least 30 minutes. Makes 12 truffles. **KT**

Recipe courtesy of Virginia Haze and Dr. K. Mandrake



According to Virginia Haze and Dr. K. Mandrake, authors of "The Psilocybin Mushroom Bible," the ginger in this recipe acts as an antiemetic, working to counteract the nausea that many people feel when consuming shrooms. The lime juice begins the breakdown of psilocybin into the psychoactive component of mushrooms, psilocin, before it enters your body, making the come-up a little faster. The chocolate helps the medicine go down. "These are strong," says Haze. "Dose low. You can always take more."