

Wild mushrooms ripe for the picking

Plenty of fungus
among us in autumn

BY JANE AMMESON
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WALLOON LAKE — When the weather starts to cool and the leaves begin to change, dedicated mushroom hunters take to the woods. For it is in the fall that a cornucopia of wild mushrooms is ready for picking.

"Fall mushrooms are a whole new world for most people," says Joe Breidenstein, who organizes mushroom forages on fall weekends near his home on Walloon Lake. "Even people who hunt for morels in the spring don't know much about fall mushrooms and how many varieties and how easy they are to eat and how easy they are to find.

With the help of two mushroom experts, both past presidents of the Michigan Mushroom Society who have more than 70 years of gathering experience between them, weekend foragers quickly learn what's safe to pick.

For those used to mushroom names like button and moonlight, the names Breidenstein lists are unfamiliar and not like anything you'll find in the supermarket. There's shaggy mane, chanterelles, sulfur shelf, puffballs and chicken-of-the-woods (not to be confused with hen-of-the-woods) — and yes, it does taste like chicken.

Their looks can range from beautiful (the orange sherbet-colored, ruffled-edged sulfur shelf) to weird (the scaly, gray shaggy mane). They also differ in size.



PHOTOS COURTESY JOE BREIDENSTEIN

Seeking treasures: Mushroom hunters Amy and David Larwa show off their find in a northern Michigan forest.

IF YOU GO

Mushroom hunts

Mushroom mania: The complete weekend with two nights' lodging is \$179; without lodging, it's \$124. For just the Saturday guided hunts, lunch and evening wine and dinner, the price is \$110. All rates are per person.

Information: Call (231)

535-2227, or visit springtimesplendor.com

General info: Go to americanmushrooms.com



The cache: A variety of edible mushrooms grows in the state's forests in fall.

Breidenstein's Mushroom Mania weekends include a two-night stay at his privately owned vacation homes in Walloon Lake, several hunts, a sampling of local wines and all meals, including mushroom lunches and dinners.

"They told us to pick whatever we could find," says Karen Van Fleet of Fife Lake, who attended a Mushroom Mania weekend last fall. "We found over 100 varieties, though Joe and the experts ended up throwing a lot of them away. They cooked the ones that were good to eat."

Mushroom meals include roast pork with wild mushrooms, sauteed puffballs, mushroom souffle and wild mushroom soup.

David Larwa, of Brighton, who spent a mushroom weekend with his 21-year-old daughter, now feels comfortable hunting mushrooms.

"I was out running after that weekend and saw a chicken mushroom that weighed over a pound," he says.

Besides the abundance, there are other advantages to fall fungus foraging versus spring morel hunts.

"In the fall, there aren't that many people out looking for mushrooms, so you don't have to worry about getting to a spot before someone else," Breidenstein says.

Spending the day in the woods foraging for mushrooms can be fun, but safety needs to be taken seriously. On its Web site, the Illinois Mycology Association (ilmyco.gen.chicago.il.us/) offers techniques for mushroom hunting and answers questions about what's safe and what isn't.

"We try to key on three to four good edible mushrooms that grow in the Midwest, that are easy to identify and don't have a dangerous look alike," says Breidenstein, who also supplies recipes.