



These delectable mushrooms are fun to pick and even more fun to eat!

CHANTERELLES AT THE COTTAGE

Finding and gathering these tasty mushrooms makes for a rewarding fall adventure

BY PETER A. ROBSON

“FOUND ONE!”

exclaims my buddy, Chris, as he bends down with his pocket-knife to cut the stem of a perfect orange, trumpet shaped chanterelle. “Got a gold mine over here,” I shout excitedly from 20 metres away where I’ve spotted a dozen chanterelles—about half a pound’s worth—poking through the moss. It’s been a productive few hours. Both of our

ice-cream buckets are almost full of these delicious fall treats. And while they’re also available in grocery and produce stores (for about \$8 per pound), they are so much fresher and taste so much better when gathered from the wild.

We’re tramping over a thick carpet of moss and surrounded by impressive fir, hemlock and cedar trees. The forest here is level, open and the trees are widely spaced, making for easy walking. There’s a scattering of salal and moss-covered fallen tree trunks. It is a beautiful mix of forest

CHRIS WATSON; OPPOSITE: PETER A. ROBSON

that is also perfect chanterelle habitat.

Over the span of a couple of hours, we fill our pails, delighting with each find and behaving like kids in a candy store.

Hunting Mushrooms As the summer winds down, the temperatures cool and the first rains soak into the dry earth, I begin anticipating my annual forays into the forest. And while I can hike through the forest any time of year, the opportunity to harvest wild mushrooms gives me another, more productive, purpose. Perhaps the feeling harkens back to the days we were hunter-gatherers. Even if we don't find any chanterelles, just being outdoors with good friends makes it a rewarding experience. Often I'll bring along friends who have never harvested mushrooms and they always relish the experience as well.

At home, we'll brush off any dirt, chop them up, then sauté them with a bit of butter and garlic; there are plenty of chanterelle recipes available online.

There are many types of edible mushrooms out there, and my friends and I pick several varieties, but the chanterelle was the first one I learned to identify and pick, and it is one of the easiest for beginners to identify.

Fear of Picking Most people never harvest wild mushrooms because they aren't sure which ones are edible. While many are delicious, there are others—sometimes visually similar to edible varieties—that are hallucinogenic, can destroy vital organs or even cause death. Be certain to harvest only mushrooms you are absolutely certain are the correct ones. All mushrooms should be cooked prior to eating. Some wild mushrooms can cause allergic reactions so try only a small portion if eating them for the first time.

The author's friends prepare for an afternoon of chanterelle hunting.



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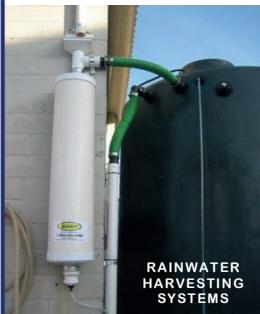
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While all this may sound daunting, with caution and a little experience, it doesn't take long to be able to identify and safely harvest at least a few common edible species.

The smartest way to start is to arrange to go along on a foray with a knowledgeable friend or group of people who are experienced pickers. There are a number of mushroom guidebooks that can be studied and carried in the field. They provide valuable information about identification through size, colour, habitat, time of year they appear, gill shape, stem shape, smell and spore prints.

Most communities have local wildlife societies with mushroom expert members and which organize forays. Some hold open houses where various types of mushrooms are on display and experts are on hand to answer questions and help identify mushrooms brought in by the public.

Chanterelle mushrooms of various varieties can be found in coniferous forests throughout the world. However, the most common species in Western Canada is the yellow, or golden, chanterelle (*Cantharellus cibarius*). Like all mushrooms, the visible portion of the fungus is the fruiting body of the mycelium, a network of underground microscopic fibres

that live in partnership with trees (mycorrhizal fungi). When healthy and when conditions allow, the mycelium pushes up its annual crop.

Chanterelles can be found from late summer to late November and typically start appearing after the first fall rains. On the BC coast, look for an open, mossy-floored forest with fir, hemlock, spruce and/or cedar. Further east, they can also be found associated with hardwood trees where pastures meet the woods. Chanterelles are almost always found growing in undisturbed soil where the trees are at least 60 years of age (about 18 inches or more in diameter) and in old growth forests.

The yellow or orange chanterelle has a yellow-orange cap, stalk and its flesh is creamy white. It grows to about 10 centimetres wide. Look for prominent ridges or blunt veins under the cap and running down to the ground (not terminating at the top of the stem). Initially the caps are rounded and then become flat and then upturned (trumpet shaped) with the centre slightly sunken. The stems are fibrous and, when bent, won't snap

Left: The author with his harvest.

Right: Chanterelles are usually found growing in undisturbed soil and in old growth forests.



Picking Legalities and Etiquette

It is legal to pick mushrooms on provincial forest lands. With permission, it is permitted to pick mushrooms from Indian reserves, tree farm licenses, regional parks, leased Crown land and private lands. Harvesting is not permitted in national parks, Department of National Defence lands,

provincial parks, ecological or special reserves, and recreation areas.

When picking, do not rake or otherwise disturb the moss layers. If proper harvesting techniques are followed, the fungus that produces the mushroom will produce year after year.

Avid mushroom hunters spend a lot of time seeking productive patches of ground, and if a friend is kind enough to take you out to one of "their" spots, picking etiquette dictates that you keep that spot to yourself, and do not go back there without an invitation or share its location with others.

LEFT: CHRIS WATSON; RIGHT: PETER A. ROBSON

MUSHROOM POISONING

If you feel symptoms of poisoning or get sick from eating mushrooms, contact your local poison control centre or go to your local hospital emergency. Keep a specimen to help the doctors determine what kind of mushroom you have consumed.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

The following associations are a great place to start. They have useful information, links and information about group forays.

- The Vancouver Mycological Associations
vanmyco.com
- The South Vancouver Island Mycological Association
www.svims.ca
- The Alberta Mycological Society
www.wildmushrooms.ws

Also, check with your local wildlife society to see if they have members involved in gathering mushrooms.

off cleanly. They are slightly fragrant often with a fruity smell. When beyond their prime, they become waterlogged and appear whitish or ochre around the edges. When cutting them, use a knife to cut the stem just above ground. There are several other edible species of chanterelle, but beginners should stick with the yellow/golden chanterelle.

Other Mushrooms After making a few forays, you will learn about other edible mushrooms such as puffballs, hedgehogs, morels, pine mushrooms, shaggy manes and others. However, again, do not eat any mushroom until you are certain it is actually the species you think it and that it is edible.

I caught the mushroom bug a decade ago when a neighbour brought over a handful of fresh chanterelles. They were excellent eating. I was soon quizzing him as to where he got them and then started learning as much as I could about wild edible mushrooms. I've now discovered a number of areas on the Sunshine Coast I visit every year. Most years, I make five or six forays during the fall and I can generally count on coming home with a few pounds each time. Kept refrigerated with paper towels in a non-airtight container, they keep for several weeks—plenty of time to use them in all kinds of recipes. Foraging is a fun activity that has added an exciting new dimension to my yearly adventures. 🍄



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