

Mushroom followers flock to Mount Pisgah

By Lori Steinhauer
Of the Emerald

If variety is the spice of life, then a forest of flavor was in the offering as mushroom enthusiasts and inquirers came to Mount Pisgah for the third annual Mount Pisgah Arboretum Mushroom Show and Plant Sale on Sunday. Upon tables covered with moss and leaves were 207 mushroom species in a natural autumn setting.

The arboretum barn filled with fungi of all shapes, colors and sizes, was visited

throughout the day by more than 1,000 spectators young and old. Some mushrooms looked like rubberized coral in tones of oranges, pinks, browns and creams. Others took the form of giant leathery marigolds. And others resembled slimy buttons — some fluorescent pink and some olive green.

And for the fungus pickers and eaters at the show, the ordinary mushrooms cultivated indoors and sold in supermarkets could hardly hold a candle to the wild ones.

"There are a whole host of different flavors in mushrooms," ranging from licorice to apricot, nut and garlic, said Freeman Rowe, a Lane Community College professor who teaches a general biology course with special emphasis on mushrooms. Rowe, whose students and former students picked the mushrooms for the show, was available to answer questions and identify fungi brought by the public.

One man stepped up to the table where Rowe sat, and pulled a chunky, foot-long mushroom from the basket he was carrying for Rowe to identify.

"That's a King Boletus," Rowe said. "It's edible in



Photos by Michael Clapp

More than 1,000 spectators attended the third annual Mount Pisgah Arboretum Mushroom Show and Plant Sale on Sunday and were treated to a display of 207 mushroom species.



Freeman Rowe

choice. It's sought after all over America and Europe."

Near Rowe's table was another table with "Mushroom

Madness," for sale. This 76-page cookbook is filled with tips and more than 30 recipes for wild-mushroom cookery, featuring ways to bake, stuff, sautee and pickle mushrooms.

But the true adventure in wild mushrooms comes before cooking them.

"Going mushroom hunting is like reliving a childhood easter egg hunt," Rowe said.

"It's never knowing what's over the next hill that makes mushroom hunting fascinating," he said.

However, "you never eat anything unless you're absolutely certain of its identification," he said. "That seems to be so obvious."

Yet people often come up to Rowe and describe a mushroom

they've already eaten, and ask him to identify it.

Rowe said the best way to learn mushroom identification is through formal courses or through field trips with people who know what they are picking. "It's much better to be able to look at the actual mushroom and have it identified for you," he said.

"You have to know the individual mushroom. There are no general tests. Some of them are very distinctive and you can learn to identify them by looking at them just one time, and others are very difficult (to identify)," he explained.

Meanwhile, one spectator at the show had his own system for identifying mushrooms.

"The ones that dance the marumba are wild," he said.

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