

CLOSE TO HOME

Stalking the wild mushroom

By DAVID CAMPICHE
FOR COAST WEEKEND

Way back when, reading “The Lord of the Rings” to my three children, I came across an early chapter when the four hobbits, on the run from the diabolical ring wraiths, stumble upon a mushroom patch, abscond with the lovely morsels, and quickly prepare a rabbit stew with their bounty. No matter that evil was on their trail, their stomachs ruled the day.

I suppose, if you’re about to be subjugated by evil forces, you might as well get a lick in and eat a batch of the edible fungi first. It may just be your last divine moment.

Please, I’m not suggesting that if you are outrunning a freak wave, you should dally and prepare such a meal, but you might reach down, grab a few fungi on the run and prepare them later, while sitting atop a tall dry hill — assuming, of course, you have brought along butter and cream and maybe a splash of Armagnac.

Varieties galore

Maybe those mushrooms were *Agaricus campestris*, the “meadow mushroom.” Maybe fairy ring mushrooms. Maybe others — man on horseback, deliciosos, porcini. There are dozens if not hundreds of varieties scattered across North America (and The Shire). There are hundreds in Pacific and Clatsop counties.

The meadow mushroom — 10 centimeters wide, convex, white to creamy in color with a dry smooth cap — loves cow fields and smooth grassy yards. Picked young before they turn dark brown under the cap, they sauté into delectables perfect in stews, omelets, pastas and, well, darn near any earthly concoction that enters a sauté pan.

Those young hobbits were smart creatures, in love with fine country cuisine. Here, in Pacific and Clatsop counties, a plethora of the stemmed fungi dominates forests, fields and backyards during the fall. They love a moist warm climate, normally September, October and early November. Recent bouts of drought have postponed this sprouting pattern, but hope lives in the minds and hearts of truly addicted mycologists.

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PHOTO BY LAURIE ANDERSON

Though growers have met with some success in cultivating oyster mushrooms, it remains a celebrated find to stumble upon them in the wild.

