

'I'VE GOT ONE!'

Hunting neon scorpions in the Arizona desert



IF YOU GO

Scorpion hunts are done in Southwest states like Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada and others. The best way to find excursions is to search online for the dates you will be in the area. Remember to wear closed-toed shoes and pants and bring black lights. While children adore such outings, make sure they are old enough to follow directions of the tour leader. For more on the scorpion hunt, check out the latest episode of The Associated Press' "Get Outta Here" podcast.

AP Photo/Peter Prengaman

A scorpion appears in a tank after being captured in Lost Dutchman State Park, Ariz.

By PETER PRENGAMAN
Associated Press

LOST DUTCHMAN STATE PARK, Ariz. — As the setting sun left a yellow tinge on dirt-colored cactuses as far as the eye could see, park ranger Anna Roberts gave us a lesson on what we were about to hunt.

"Scorpions know they will not kill us because we are much larger," said Roberts, explaining that the animals' first instinct would be to escape, not sting, and that fatalities from bites in the U.S. were rare. "So, you don't have worry about that."

The light-hearted preparatory chat also came with a serious message: Don't be dumb with scorpions, which move quickly on eight legs and are equipped with pincer claws and curved tails that lash enemies and deposit venom.

Closed-toed shoes were a must, the critters should only be picked up with tongs, and they should not be played with — a message I made sure my oldest children, boys ages 8 and 9, heard.

Having just moved with my family to Arizona, the excursion struck me as a uniquely desert-life thing to do. However, my wife, who rightly said taking our 3-year-old would have been a bad idea, thought I was nuts.

For whatever reason, I've always found scorpions intriguing, if not a little terrifying. A glance at popular culture tells me I'm not alone.

In movies, on the skin of many tattoo lovers and in one of the 12 astrological signs, scorpions' distinct shape and supposed attributes are often on display. They are portrayed as savage, lethal, true warriors — not far off from what we were about to see on the hunt.

As we walked into the desert under the moonlight, we carried flashlights to see where we were stepping. The terrain was rocky, dusty and uneven, mixed with rough underbrush. Crucial to the hunt, however, were black lights: Scorpions glow under ultraviolet lights for reasons that scientists don't know.

"Why they fluoresce is the million-dol-



AP Photo/Peter Prengaman

Park Ranger Anna Roberts, center, talks about scorpions and how to catch them in Lost Dutchman State Park, Ariz. Feared, admired and loathed, scorpions have roamed the earth for 450 million years. An interesting way to learn about the critters, which glow under black lights, is to go on scorpion hunts in Southwest states like Arizona and New Mexico. Wear closed-toed shoes and pants, bring black lights and prepare to be awed.

lar question," said Lauren Esposito, curator of arachnology at the California Academy of Sciences. Some theorize that the light scares off would-be predators, while others think it might attract pollinators, potential prey.

A few minutes into the hike, neon green shapes began appearing. They ranged in length from a small grasshopper to a human finger. Upon our approach, the scorpions would sometimes scurry away, sometimes duck into a hole and, just as often, raise their pincers and arch their tails in preparation for battle. There is a reason they are apex predators in the invertebrate food chain.

"I've got one! I've got one!" people began shouting, capturing them with tongs from behind. "I need a box over here!"

A handful of people carrying plastic containers, including my sons, would come over, opening the cap so a writhing scorpion could

be placed inside. Everybody around would stop, shine black lights and stare as the scorpion began moving from one side of the box to the other.

"This is awesome!" said James Brine, a 37-year-old machinist from Tempe, a Phoenix suburb, who wore a black T-shirt with a neon scorpion on the front. "I love it."

Brine, who came out with two friends, said it was fun to see scorpions in a different way. When he was growing up, his family considered them pests.

The hearty arthropods, which have roamed the earth for millions of years, can indeed be unwanted guests. Dozens of Phoenix companies offer to spray, kill and seal scorpions out of homes. Online ads include pictures of smiling and unsuspecting little children, and warnings that scorpions could even show up in your bed.

While scorpion stings hurt — experts say they are like a bee sting — they are rarely lethal, especially in the United States. A 2008 study, "Epidemiology of scorpionism: A global appraisal," found that of about 1.2 million stings annually, 3,250, or 0.27%, resulted in death.

The highest risk areas are in parts of Africa, the Middle East, South India, Mexico and southern Latin America, and fatalities were often a result of a lack of anti-venom treatments, according to the study.

Esposito said that of about 2,500 species of scorpions worldwide, only 25 or so are truly dangerous. The most hazardous in the United States is found in Southwestern states: the Arizona bark scorpion, which is light brown and blends into the desert landscape.

While scorpions get a "bad rap," they are an important indicator of the overall health of the ecosystems where they are found, said Esposito.

"If something is going wrong in an area, scorpions are a place to look" to understand what is going on, she said.

After an hour, our group had gathered about 25 scorpions. All were placed in a large plastic box, around the size of a home aquarium. Roberts, the ranger, identified three kinds we had captured: straight tail, yellow ground and giant hairy scorpions.

Watching them interact, I was awed by their ferocity. Several attacked each other, pinching and whipping their tails, while others tried in vain to climb out, slipping on the side of the box only to charge and continue trying.

My 8-year-old, Lucas, and a few other kids captured some moths and put them in the box. A few of the bigger scorpions, thrusting the smaller ones aside, circled the moths in preparation for consumption. And then something happened that made the group go silent: One of the larger scorpions devoured a small scorpion, thrusting its entire body into its mouth.

"Why didn't he go for the moths?" shouted Lucas.

"Why go for moths," Roberts joked, "when they can eat each other?"

From common to cool: The lowly cabbage has become a star

That taken-for-granted veggie is finally getting some respect

By KATIE WORKMAN
Associated Press

CHICAGO — Here's a sentence that might come as a surprise: Cabbage is cool.

That taken-for-granted vegetable, that sturdy, dense staple of many a poor, ancestral homeland, is finally getting respect.

"It's all about how it is prepared, how it's elevated," says Paul Kahan, a James Beard award-winning chef in Chicago and self-proclaimed cabbage freak.

He thinks that because cabbage has mainly been associated with sustenance, it hasn't been given its due.

Cabbage is part of most of the world's cooking history. Perhaps most famously, it was one of the only sources of sustenance in famine-ravaged Ireland in the mid-19th century. Thus the classic Irish dish corned beef and cabbage, not to mention colcannon.

In China, there's cabbage sauteed with bean curd. In England, cabbage cooked with potatoes and other vegetables in bubble and squeak. In Norway, the hot and sour surkal. In the U.S., coleslaw. Fermented and pickled cabbage dishes abound, including kimchi in Korea, and sauerkraut in Poland, Germany and other parts of middle and Eastern Europe. Stuffed cabbage rolls are part of just about every cuisine, from golabki in Poland to holishkes in Jewish cooking to sarma in Croatia.

There's more, but the point is: In all times and places, cabbage has been valued for its plenteousness, cheapness, long shelf life, and ability to be preserved for an even longer shelf life. It can be eaten raw or cooked in pretty much any way a vegetable can be cooked.



AP Photo/Cheyenne Cohen, File

This 2018 photo provided by Katie Workman shows a dish of cod, cabbage and edamame taken in New York. Cabbage, that taken-for-granted vegetable, that sturdy, dense staple of many a poor, ancestral homeland, is finally getting respect.

Now, it's also trendy.

"It's just delicious," says Kahan.

He has been on the cabbage wagon for years, serving it at his upscale Chicago restaurants in various guises. At Publican, they char wedges of cabbage in a wood-burning hearth and then finish them in a pan with butter and shallots. Kahan remembers being inspired by a dish made by New Orleans chef Alon Shaya: "It was the first time I ever saw a chunk of cabbage served at a restaurant."

Robert Schueller, the "Produce Guru" at Melissa's Produce, a specialty company out of Los Angeles, says chefs and restaurants are

the clear drivers behind the cabbage movement. Cabbage is being used as everything from a taco topping (common in Mexico) to a base or nest for menu items such as marinated fish. Chefs like how cabbage maintains a crisper texture than other greens when served with warm foods, he says.

"We have seen a rise in Napa cabbage, too, which is used in Asian stir fries, fermentation and pickling, all of which are gaining in popularity. The most interesting thing is that the rise of Napa is not just in Asian groceries and restaurants," Schueller says.

Gabriel Kreuther gets creative with cab-

GET THE RECIPE

Katie Workman writes regularly about food for The Associated Press. She has this cabbage recipe on her blog. <https://themom100.com/recipe/one-pot-cod-cabbage-and-edamame/>

bage at his eponymous restaurant in New York City. He purees well-cooked cabbage as a base for some garnishes; uses it in a side dish with trumpet mushrooms warmed in duck fat; and serves up a simple slaw of shredded cabbage, onion, oil, vinegar, and salt and pepper, maybe with some julienned gruyere cheese mixed in.

"It goes with everything; it's refreshing, it gets better with a few days macerating time, it's soft and crunchy, it's healthy," Kreuther says.

At the restaurant, they make their own sauerkraut, a dish he grew up with in his native Alsace region of France. Kreuther serves the sauerkraut in a smoked turgeon; his sauerkraut tartlet topped with caviar mouseline is in a filo pastry shell and served under a wine glass filled with smoke.

Kreuther likes mixing poor man's food with luxury ingredients and seeing how they play against each other. That explains another dish on his menu: layers of squab breast and foie gras wrapped with cabbage leaves, and then encased in Tunisian brik dough and seared until the outside is crispy.

And how do people react when they see cabbage on this highbrow menu?

"People pooh-poo cabbage," he says, "but when they taste it well prepared they say, 'Oh, I didn't realize cabbage could be so delicious.'"