

Wild mushrooms



CHANTERELLE



PORCINI (KING BOLETES)



MOREL



MATSUTAKE (PINE MUSHROOMS)

Get out the sauté pan!

Fall mushroom season starting early this year

By TOM BANSE
Northwest News Network

Pacific Northwesters who forage for wild mushrooms are noticing that the late summer and fall delicacies are coming in early this year. Edible wild mushrooms are now flooding wholesale markets.

In the maritime Northwest, chanterelles are coming in at least three weeks early. In the Cascade Mountains, porcini (aka king boletes) and matsutakes (aka pine mushroom) are poking up earlier than normal, too.

"We're already seeing mushrooms coming in that generally don't show up until the middle of September," Charlie Wiley, a commercial mushroom buyer in southwest Washington state and owner of Pacific Northwest Wild Mushrooms, said. "We've got pine mushrooms coming in. I can't remember ever getting them in August."

Wiley guessed the wild mushrooms were triggered to fruit early by mild, moist summer weather.



Colin Murphey/The Astorian

Mushroom pickers flock to Fort Stevens State Park during peak foraging season.

"Mother Nature is finicky and she definitely tricked them," Wiley said. "It's shaping up to be an outstanding mushroom crop this year."

Wiley said wholesale prices are falling fast as pickers bring in big harvests, which means you might want to keep an eye out for specials at supermar-

kets and restaurants.

A new festival in Oregon to celebrate wild mushrooms had to be moved up by a week to Aug. 25 because the star attrac-

tion is arriving early. The Mt. Hood Meadows Mushroom Festival was originally scheduled for Labor Day weekend.

Vice president Dave Trageathon said his Mount Hood resort previously hosted mushroom dinners in the spring and fall, but expanded the program this year to include guided hikes, cooking demos and a food fest.

"We are making this more about discovery and getting into the forest to find some treasures, identifying them and coming up with delicious ways to prepare and present them," Trageathon said.

Novices interested in foraging for wild mushrooms are strongly urged to go out with a mushroom expert until they get the hang of fungi identification.

Commercial mushroom foragers hope the unusual early arrival of fall fungi does not lead to an early end of this year's season as well.

"Hopefully, we'll still get another flush of things in the fall," Dena Wiley, a partner in the Pacific Northwest Wild Mushrooms company, said. "We count on the October mushrooms to come in for the Thanksgiving holidays."

Transit district in search of bus drivers

By LUCY KLEINER
The Astorian

The Sunset Empire Transportation District is under pressure to hire bus drivers for a major expansion and a crush of cruise ship visits this fall.

"It's not just unique to our agency," Jeff Hazen, the transit district's executive director, said. "It's a nationwide issue of finding drivers for transit."

The expansion, funded by a payroll tax that was part of a transportation package passed by the state Legislature in 2017, is scheduled to begin in October. The first project Sunset Empire will focus on is providing weekend bus service in Astoria.

In September and October, Astoria is expected to welcome 11 cruise ships, including three on Sept. 26 that could flood the city with more than 4,450 visitors.

Sunset Empire adds two routes on days when cruise ships are in town to accommodate passengers and crew. The transit district is concerned the lack of bus drivers and the demands cruise ships put on bus lines will delay the expansion.

"I've got my fingers crossed," Hazen said. "But it just depends if we can hire a few more drivers."

Hazen needs four drivers before October and 10 within the next year to tackle the expansion and the cruise ship lineup.

On cruise ship days, Sunset Empire adds Route 11 and Route 12.



Colin Murphey/The Astorian

Passengers disembark a cruise ship at the Port of Astoria in 2018.

Route 11 is designed to move passengers from the Port of Astoria to downtown. The bus makes stops at 10th Street and the Columbia River Maritime Museum before looping back to the Port.

The second route, Route 12, targets the cruise ship's crew. That route goes from the Port to shopping centers in Warrenton, including Fred Meyer, Costco and Walmart, where the crew can purchase groceries, toiletries and other items.

By the time the cruise ship season ends in late October, 18 ships will have visited Astoria this year. The number is expected to nearly double in 2020, when 33 cruise ships are scheduled to visit.

"Right now, we have enough buses to transport when we activate the Route 11 and Route 12 on cruise ship days," Hazen said. "But with the amount of cruise ships scheduled next year

and the amount of passengers coming in, we won't have enough."

When passengers arrive at the Port, they are welcomed by the Clatsop Cruise Hosts, a group of volunteers in blue vests that help visitors navigate the city. Other transportation options include walking, renting a car or using tour buses for planned outings. But Mudge said the majority of passengers use transit district buses.

The growing number of cruise ships will increase the burden on the two routes, and without enough bus drivers, passengers could have to wait longer.

"It's just a continual line for the first hour or two," Mudge said of the experience now. "Think of moving a thousand people. That's a lot of bus runs."

"Large ships, anything 2,000-plus, those are the ones that are a challenge," she said. "Moving even half of those passengers landing in our town (is) a lot of work."

One of the solutions Hazen has suggested is to acquire larger buses that can hold up to 100 people. Though steps have yet to be taken to acquire the buses, he is hopeful other agencies will donate used buses to Sunset Empire as there is typically a fee to have older buses removed.

Federal grant funds Oregon whale research

The Astorian

at how to avoid conflicts between whales and fishing gear.

The state has landed a federal grant that will fund research into whale entanglement issues off the Oregon Coast.

The federal species recovery grant the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife received this month — a total of nearly \$270,000 that spans three fiscal years — will allow researchers to delve deeper into research that looks

California, Oregon and Washington state have coordinated efforts to address conflicts between foraging whales and fishing gear, specifically commercial Dungeness crabbing gear.

The research in Oregon, conducted by Oregon State University in collaboration with the Coast Guard, began this year with initial funding from the Oregon Dungeness Crab Commission.

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