

Discovering wild mushrooms in the woods



Wild mushrooms come in a variety of sizes and colors.
Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

SALT POINT STATE PARK – Red, yellow, orange, brown, white, green. Tiny and huge. Slimy and delicate. Spongy and bulbous. Edible and non.

These were clearly not your grocery store variety of mushrooms. And, yet, we kept picking them. What we didn't do was eat them.

Sue and I were on our first mushroom foray in October. While I have hunted for mushrooms in Lake Tahoe, that was always for personal consumption. This was more for education.



Mushrooms often blend in with the environment.

The Sonoma County Mycological Association (SOMA) led us into the woods of Salt Point State Park, which is one of two California state parks to allow people to forage for wild mushrooms. The limit is 31 pounds per person.

Nearly 300 varieties of fungi grow in this coastal park, with many of them OK to eat.

“It’s more of a quest than anything else,” Jim Wheeler, board member of the mycological association, said. “We are not hunting because the mushrooms don’t move.”

But they do hide.



Wild mushroom on Sonoma coast.

Some are tucked under foliage, others grow under downed trees,

while a few are able to camouflage themselves. Then others are out in the open, bright and ready to be plucked like a wildflower.

Many of the nearly 40 people on the foray were first-timers. It was like we were on a treasure hunt as we whispered to one another. Fog seeped through the dense redwoods, adding a sense of mystery to our outing.

SOMA has forays September-May, with a three-day camp in January. And the mushrooms in the Bay Area, well, they are multiplying in ways that haven't been seen the last three years. This is all because the December rains are just what the fungi love.

All mycological groups are serious about their mushrooms. But most are also inclusive, eager to share their knowledge and bring more people into the inner circle.



Sorting through the haul.

People are separating their finds with wax paper. Some photograph the specimens and take notes in journals. Baskets and canvas bags are slowly filling up with mushrooms of all shapes, sizes and colors.

Experienced shroomers know the scientific names and which are edible. They seem to find them faster as well.

On this particular day we spread out a haul that more than filled a picnic table. Porcini, slippery Jacks, golden chanterelles, coral, spy are just a few of the varieties.