

GUIDED FORAGING EXPEDITIONS



Foraged fiddlehead ferns

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When Seattle resident James Nowak isn't in his glass studio creating colorful pieces inspired by tide pools and coral, chances are he's out foraging for mushrooms in the mountains an hour or two outside of his urban home. If it's truffle season, from late fall to spring in the Northwest, Nowak is out hunting with his dog, Augustus Ignacio, an Italian breed trained to sniff out these delicacies.

"When he finds a truffle he goes ballistic," Nowak says. "It's a big scene. Fortunately we're in the woods so no one can see us because it's kind of ridiculous."

Nowak, through his company Terra Fleurs (terra-fleurs.com/tours.html), sells his finds at Seattle-area farmers markets. Many are destined for the skilled hands of chefs at top restaurants like Seattle's La Spiga and Lark. But some of Nowak's customers are so intrigued by mushrooms they opt to hunt for themselves—and learn from the master.

Nowak is one of many Northwest foragers offering guided foraging expeditions for wild, edible items like chanterelle and morel mushrooms, fiddlehead ferns, wild ginger, stinging nettles, wild watercress, wood sorrel, sea beans, various berries, spruce tips and more. These experts can identify native edibles and medicinals and teach participants how to distinguish them from harmful lookalikes and how to cook, brew, dehydrate, pickle and otherwise utilize their finds.

Nowak's mushroom tours are typical of what you'd experience in the Northwest: you'll bring rain gear, wear a good pair of hiking boots, and pack your own food and water. Chances are you'll traverse some rugged terrain and the trip is on whether it rains or not, unless there's a strong storm with heavy rain and lightning. Typical hikes range in distance between four to six miles, and the amount of mushrooms you take home depends greatly on the number of people in your group, the season, and legal limits on the amount you can harvest. Nowak's groups find mushrooms like oysters, king boletus, turkey tails, bear's tooth and shaggy mane.

Elsewhere in Washington, organizations like the North Cascades Institute (ncascades.org) offer a variety of classes and expeditions on foraged edibles, from mushrooms to sea vegetables to shellfish. The institute's Wild Edibles class on Lopez Island is a three-day course involving harvesting items from land and sea, learning culinary, medicinal and First Nation traditional uses, and then cooking a four-course dinner of kelp-robed salmon, sea bean sauté, sea veggie soup and chocolate ocean mousse pie thickened with seaweed.

Wild food expert and author Langdon Cook (langdoncook.com/classes) also hosts expeditions through Seward Park in Seattle, showing city slickers how to find edibles in plain sight.

In Oregon, Trackers Portland (trackerspdx.com) shuttles participants to their camp in Sandy, Oregon, for classes like Wilder Plant Basics and Medicinal Plants & Winter Remedies. The company Wild Food Adventures (wildfoodadventures.com) offers a variety of hands-on classes and workshops in various states, though most are concentrated in Oregon. There are expeditions focused on ginger, Pacific Coast sea vegetables, Northwest forest fruits, collecting oil from plants and even urban foraging adventures.

Chris Mathe, a morel mushroom forager based in Georgia, leads morel hunts with cooking demonstrations in several U.S. states, including Idaho, Washington, Oregon, and Alaska. The trips usually last three days and fill up fast; availability is listed on Chris's website at morelmushroomhunting.com.

British Columbia's Swallow Tail Tours (swallowtail.ca) offers spring, summer and fall foraging tours near Vancouver that often involve a chef-created meal from plants like fiddleheads, licorice fern, big leaf maple flowers, nettles and oyster mushrooms.

An organization called Beers Made by Walking (beersmadebywalking.com) has put a special twist on the foraging trend. The program gathers brewers and interested participants for short walks through urban landscapes—typically public parks—to learn about local flora for foraging purposes. Though no actual foraging takes place, the walks are deeply educational, and participants can put into practice what they've learned on the walks.

For their part, the brewers create beers based on the plants they've learned about, with recent concoctions such as huckleberry saison, wild watercress farmhouse blonde, and a spruce tip and elderflower imperial IPA. Beers Made By Walking also organizes tasting events once the beers have been brewed; the events also act as fundraisers for local environmental organizations. Trips in the Northwest take place in Bellingham, Bend, Eugene, Portland, and Seattle. **EW**



A truffle treasure

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