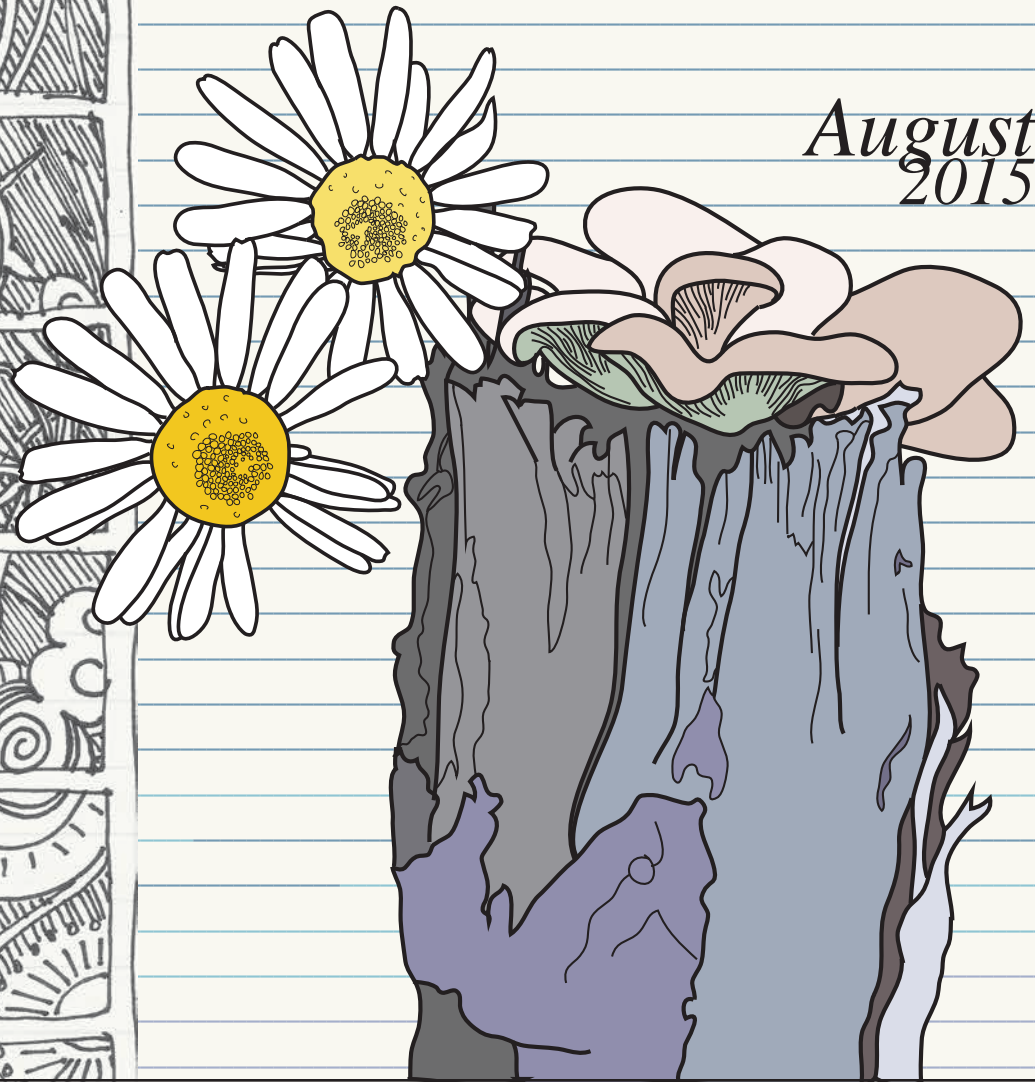


WILD

Edible NoteBook

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Hi and thanks so much for checking out the *Wild Edible NoteBook*, a collection of stories about foraging and using edible wild foods.

Two different wild mushrooms are featured in this edition—chanterelles and oyster mushrooms.

The chanterelle story, by Wendy Petty, might be the best description of Colorado chanterelle hunting out there. In this piece, she expands on the hauntingly poetic chanterelle story originally published at her blog, *Hunger & Thirst*, to give us the

in's and out's of Colorado chanterelle hunting. Next is a story on oyster mushrooms by yours truly, based on my experience hunting two different types of oysters among high country aspens and "low-country" cottonwoods. Next is a tale of four edible daisies—some of which are considered invasive weeds—followed by a handful of recipes.

2023 Update:

Begun as a free publication in 2011, the *Wild Edible NoteBook* was available by subscription from 2014-2015. It went on hiatus after that so I could undertake other pursuits, chief among them a book I am writing.

I have since decided to reissue the *Notebooks*, a process that involves reading through and correcting any glaring errors. My thinking has evolved on some topics since then, but for the most part I have not rewritten any stories.

For current writing, please visit my blog at wildfoodgirl.com, or Facebook (@wildfoodgirl), Instagram (@wild.food.girl), or YouTube (@9148), where I post regularly.



WFG photo by Gregg Davis.

Sincerely,
—WFG

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*Not only were there oyster mushrooms in the aspen forest, there were bright orange aspen boletes (*Leccinum insigne* group) everywhere.*

Although there is a long culinary tradition of eating aspen boletes, reports of sickenings in Colorado and uncertainty about species-level identification cause some experts to recommend against eating them.

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A Season of Chanterelles *By Wendy Petty*

I suppose to some, the essential question would be why? Why would I awaken in the middle of the night to slip into the deep-mountain woods at dawn, just for the sake of finding a food I could buy for far less trouble?

If you have to ask the question, I wonder if you will ever be satisfied by the answers I give?

Have you ever bellied-up to the earth and pressed your cheek against a patch of moss so cool and green that it seems to have pooled every notion you ever had of the color? Have you stood in a place so still that the only sounds you could hear were the blood pushing past your eardrums and your lungs pulling in air? Have you turned a corner to see hundreds of mushrooms scuttle across the forest floor and dropped to your knees in submission, surrender, to the wonder?



*Forest gold, mushroom bliss.
Photo by Wendy Petty.*

Maybe.

Mushroom hunting demands reawakening to sensations both uncomfortable and thrilling. Bewilderment. Getting lost. The elevator-drop of falling in love.

You don't think you can fall in love with fungus? Once, an old Italian gentleman leaned in with his cappuccino-laced accent and reminded me that mushrooms are like snakes, equal parts magnetism and danger. I challenge you to smash your face down into a basket of freshly-picked chanterelles, close your eyes, and languidly inhale. Does their scent of warm crayons and slow-roasted sweet potatoes not tickle the same buttons as mother's milk and the

first time a hand, electric with desire, brushed your bare skin?

Kneeling, I'm small beneath the trapeze of clouds and conifers. At the intersection of hot resin air and the damp sound-draining mats of kinnikinnick, I pluck one, orange as fresh turmeric. Chanterelle. The doughy weight of it against my palm. Margins curling like a salt-stricken slug. Wrinkly ridges, like convolutions on the surface of my brain. More closely related to an animal than a plant. I hold it to my nose as I roll onto my back and take in the limitless Colorado sky.

You don't think you can fall in love with fungus? Photo by Wendy Petty.



Hunting Chanterelles in the North-Central Colorado Rockies

My experience hunting chanterelles (*Cantharellus* sp.) is limited to a small section of Colorado in the mountains west of Denver and Boulder. Mushrooms are known to behave differently from region to region, so this account may not apply to your locale. Even so, I hope you can draw some inspiration for your own mushroom missions from my journey.

I started looking for chanterelles at the same time I began finding morels and porcini. I spent years looking for chanterelles, though never found a one. I had thought that they were hard to find, yellow-ish, and rested at the edge of aspen groves. In all of my miles of walking, I was unable to find chanterelles.

Then, two years ago, Wild Food Girl surprised me with a foray with Chef Bill Greenwood of Beano's Cabin, whom she'd given instruction about wild edible plants. Bill had experience with chanterelles, and took us up his secret trail to show us chanterelle habitat. Much to my surprise, the chanterelles were far more orange than I had imagined, and were nestled in an outcropping of boulders. That same evening, Chef Greenwood prepared a dish that I still consider to be one of the single best recipes I've ever tasted. It contained



Top: A chanterelle hunt in Breckenridge two years ago delivered this clumping beauty.

Bottom: Another high country chanterelle. Note the creamy white flesh where it is cut. The rest of the mushroom is a consistent golden color.



chanterelles, along with wood ear mushrooms, in a smoky broth of salmon and pork. Later that same weekend, Wild Food Girl arranged a second chanterelle foray with a friend, who generously took us to his chanterelle spot in a lodgepole pine forest. We found only a few that day. However, those two brief chanterelle encounters stuck in my memory. The season ended before I was able to find more.

The next year, remembering the brilliant orange and heavenly aroma of chanterelles, I was determined to figure out how to find them for myself. I cruised my favorite forum for fungal intelligence, the Facebook group page for our local mycological society. There, I learned that people were finding chanterelles in kinnikinnick (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*) in forests of ponderosa

or lodgepole pine. Many reported them as being small, like the popcorn shrimp of mushrooms. I made my mental notes and poked around, here and there.

A key thing happened last year that ultimately led to my success with chanterelles—for the first time in my experience, it was a poor year for porcini near me. That forced me out of my usual spruce/fir porcini haunts, and out to explore new trails. By chance, I ended up at a place that was mostly pine, both ponderosa (*Pinus ponderosa*) and lodgepole (*P. contorta*), with just a sprinkling of spruce (*Picea spp.*). I walked around in that area for about an hour without finding many choice edible

*Hello? Are you chanterelles?
You most certainly are.*



mushrooms, disappointed by the sight of picked and discarded mushrooms from another hunter who'd Godzilla'ed his or her way through the woods. Frustrated, and about to turn around, I wandered off trail to find a place to pee. Mid-squat, I looked next to me and saw orange. I whispered to myself, "chanter-effing-elles!"

From that point on, I put my nose to the ground and found patch after patch of chanterelles, shocked both by their large size, and how it appeared that one or more previous mushroom hunters had walked right past them. Over the course of the chanterelle flush, I

One day, we walked for many, many hours, but it was worth it, because we doubled our take in the last hour.

walked many miles and got to know their territory well. Much like I'd done in the past with porcini, I got a sense of where chanterelles would grow, and could walk into an area and say, "If I were a chanterelle, I'd live here."

So far in 2015, which has been an early and already fantastic mushrooming season in Colorado, I've easily collected 50 pounds of chanterelles, while leaving behind plenty for the forest and other foragers.

Here's what I've learned about finding chanterelles in my area. Chanterelles do indeed like pine trees, and I'm not using that as a generalist term for conifers. I've found the most plentiful clusters of chanterelles in areas that are more open and dominated by ponderosa pine. Though, I've also found plenty in forests of more densely soldiered lodgepole pine. Invariably, chanterelles are growing in pine forests that also have kinnickinick and low-lying common juniper (*Juniperus communis*) in the area. The chanterelles can grow in the kinnickinick, under the juniper, or be

Right: Chanterelles glow in the foreground of a pine forest dotted with common juniper and kinnickinick.

Next page: More chanterelles to be found in a densely soldiered pine forest. Take a few minutes to clean them in the field to make for easier work back home.

Photos by Wendy Petty.





more out in the open, pushing up pine needle duff. Areas that are crowded to the point of being covered with kinnikinnick or other ground cover are less likely to have chanterelles than places with patches of it here and there, and ground covered with pine needles in between.

I have, indeed, found many chanterelles that are like popcorn shrimp. However, it seems that if left untouched in ideal growing conditions, they can get quite a bit larger. On at least a dozen occasions, I've found chanterelles as big as my palm.

From above, young chanterelles can look

like an "LBM" or "little brown mushroom," a term often given to a host of difficult-to-identify, smaller, brown, gilled mushrooms. Thus they are not likely to be identified by someone seeking edibles, because their caps can be somewhat matte and orangey buff colored. Chanterelles are most often gregarious, growing in clusters or small groupings, though I've occasionally found solitary ones. The outline of the cap of chanterelles can sometimes be round in younger specimens, though it is rarely the

Chanterelles out in the open, pushing up pine duff, around 8,000 feet in Colorado.





perfect circle seen in other mushrooms. The caps of younger chanterelles often remain flush with the ground, not showing their stem. Older chanterelles have irregularly shaped caps, owing to their margins that either go slightly ruffled, or turn up into flute shapes. When viewed from a distance, which gives a more side-on view, chanterelle clusters may appear more orange. If you find one cluster of chanterelles, it is often wise to search the immediate area for mushroom-humps, or areas where newly-emerging groups are pushing up the ground. I've found that chanterelles that have a hard time pushing through a layer of pine duff grow relatively tall in their attempt to reach the light.

There are two key features to identifying chanterelles. First, chanterelle mushrooms have an unmistakable

Chanterelles intermingle with kinnikinnick. Peek through the kinnikinnick, or low huckleberries depending where you are, so as not to miss any.

Not a Chanterelle By WFG

It might take some looking to find your first chanterelle. A couple years ago, I spent a season spotting for orange every time we went into the forest. Here are some of the things I found that were *not* chanterelles:



It seemed promising from afar, but alas, it was not a chanterelle, it was a price tag.



Above: This orange stuff on the ground also did not turn out to be a chanterelle.



Above: This guy looked a little more promising than the orange price tag, but when I turned him over, he was not a chanterelle.



*Above: This mushroom is not bright enough to be a chanterelle, and it has gills that stop in a distinctive line, instead of ridges running down the stem. Could it be the false chanterelle, *Hygrophoropsis aurantiaca*, with its brownish orange stalk?*

*Left: This guy was not a chanterelle either, but I didn't mind, because he turned out to be a tasty hedgehog (*Hydnum* sp.) instead.*



Chanterelles do not have true gills. Instead, they have thick ridges that are decurrent, which means they run down the stalk.

scent. Some describe it as smelling like apricots. To be certain, it is different from the scent most recognize as being generally mushroomy, like that of grocery store button mushrooms. Chanterelles smell fruity and nearly floral. Once you've smelled them, you'll never forget the aroma.

The other big key in identifying chanterelles is their reproductive surface. Look-alikes, such as jack-o-lantern mushrooms (*Omphalotus olearius*) and false chanterelles (*Hygrophoropsis aurantiaca*), will have true gills. Chanterelles do not have gills. Instead, they have rather solid and waxy-looking ridges with forks running between. The ridges of chanterelles run most of the way down the stem. The entire underside of the Colorado chanterelles I collect is a bright





saturated orange, only a few shades less brilliant than construction orange.

Aside from the stray curled-up millipede, I've never seen a bugged-out chanterelle. When torn open, their inner flesh is a creamy white.

Picking & Cleaning Chanterelles

Knowing as I do now that chanterelles can be plentiful and grow to be pleasingly large, I try to only pick the larger ones in a cluster, gently rocking them out of the ground

*Vera Stucky Evenson includes two species of Colorado chanterelles in her book, *Mushrooms of the Rocky Mountain Region* (2015). The well-known golden chanterelle (*Cantharellus cibarius*) that taxonomists now say is not in Colorado is bright golden-yellow in color. The so-called "rainbow chanterelle" (*Cantharellus roseocanus*) has "a smoother, bright yellow-orange cap with a pinkish blush near the margin," she writes.*

whole, or breaking them off with my fingers as necessary. Since they can be a bugger to clean, it is important to spend a few seconds brushing and trimming dirt from chanterelles

before tucking them away.

My first season, I carefully brushed and picked all dirt from my precious chanterelles once I got home. This was a mind-bending and nearly impossible task. This year, forager Ellen Zachos broke me of my water-phobia when it comes to cleaning mushrooms, and I'm glad she did. Washing chanterelles makes the task of cleaning them far easier. I like to begin by filling my salad spinner bowl with cool water. I prefer this bowl to my sink because it allows enough room to clean a good amount of mushrooms, but uses a smaller amount of water than filling the

More duff-pushing chanties. Photo by Wendy Petty.

kitchen sink, in case the water gets dirty and needs to be dumped and refilled.

To clean chanterelles, I throw 2-3 handfuls into the water, swish them around, then leave them for 2-3 minutes. When I return, I once again swirl them around in the water, then buckle down and start cleaning. I grab each individual mushroom and vigorously swish it and splash it in the water. I pick it up to examine it, then use my paring knife to pick or poke or scrape any remaining bits of dirt, wiping them on a nearby towel if necessary, before giving the mushroom a final swish in the water bath. I then place it on a cotton towel to dry. This process is repeated for each



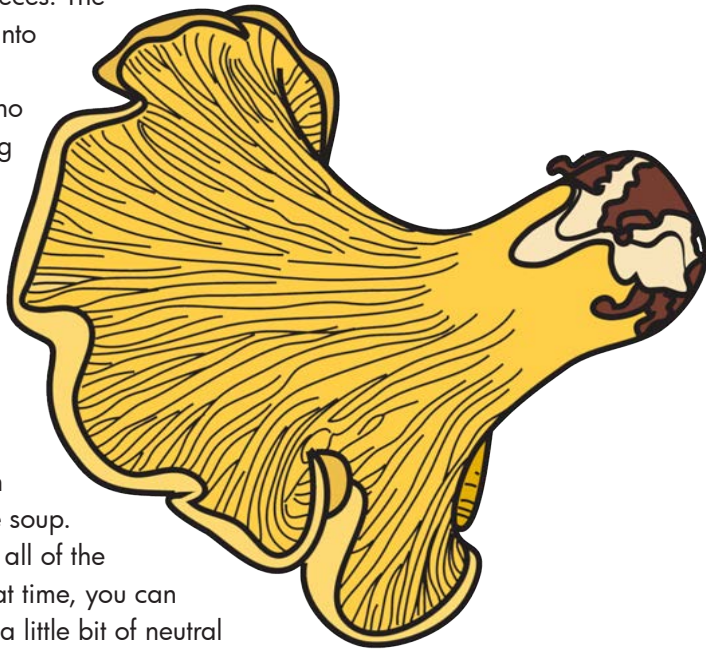
mushroom, and goes reasonably quickly. I often leave the chanterelles on the towel overnight, though they can also be used within 30 minutes.

Cooking or Preserving Chanterelles

Since chanterelles are fairly moist mushrooms, I prefer to begin by dry sautéing them. Smaller mushrooms I leave whole, while larger ones are torn (it seems wrong to me, somehow, to cut them) into smaller pieces. The mushrooms are placed into a skillet over medium to medium-high heat with no oil, and only a sprinkling of salt. Within a minute or so, the water begins to come out of the chanterelles. Give them a stir until they are all exuding moisture. If you are doing a large batch, they will release enough liquid to nearly look like soup. Keep heating them until all of the liquid evaporates. At that time, you can stir in a pat of butter or a little bit of neutral oil, and they are ready to use in a recipe or freeze. Freezing is the best method I know for preserving chanterelles, as they seem to lose both their silky texture and divine aroma when dried. I like to freeze them in small amounts, generally about 1/2 cup.

Summer Gold

Chanterelles offer up the finest qualities of summer. Traditionally thought to fruit in late summer in Colorado, if given the proper conditions, they can flush from July through September. I've observed them to be relatively slow growers, with a fruiting that lasts for approximately one month.





Oystering a Rainstorm By WFG

An oyster mushroom flushes on a standing dead aspen. Photo by Gregg Davis.

It's raining again. Is it time to go out? Into that misty aloneness, the deep and dark lush dripping forest quiet? For magical white fruitings of oyster mushrooms it is. And for all the other reasons besides.

On one such July day I donned my new rubber boots and whisked myself across Colorado's South Park to an aspen-clad mountain pass. The plants were dripping and

bright, happy pink inverted brushes of wild onion on a meadow's edge, followed by majestic purple-and-white columbines blooming in bowed profusion in a verdant green-and-white aspen forest. I ventured but a few feet off trail to find my first oyster mushroom—a cluster of white, drooping folds decorating the base of a standing dead aspen. Then I found another. And another.

That day I'd almost decided not to go out. I had a lot on my plate. But I'd promised myself a couple hours, just to remember why I do this. It was raining, but I went anyway. As if nature saw fit to reward my decision, oysters were flushing everywhere. Mosquitoes bit me on the face repeatedly, but I didn't care. I tiptoed around in my tall rubber boots under cover of mist and rain, giggling with glee, my mushroom

Another aspen oyster, foraged in July in Colorado at 10,000 feet. Photo by Gregg Davis.

pillowcase slung over my shoulder. I got 3 1/2 pounds in less than an hour.

About Oysters

Oysters are a widely distributed group of mushrooms found growing in shelved clusters on dead wood throughout the north temperate zone. Their stems tend to be off-center or even absent, and when you spore-print them, you get white to lilac-colored spores. The most





common species are white, off-white, or brownish in color.

“The cap color and position of the stem depend to some extent on the location of the fruiting body,” David Arora writes in *Mushrooms Demystified* (1986). “When growing out of the side of a log, the stem is lateral or absent, since there is no need to elevate the cap. When growing from the top of a log, however, the stem can be central.” He notes that oyster mushroom caps are generally darker in sunlight.

The most well-known of the wild oysters is *Pleurotus ostreatus*, though the group is considered to be in flux, such that the term “oyster mushroom,” and the genus name *Pleurotus* are used to refer to a number of related edible species. Here up high where I live, the so-called “aspen oyster” *Pleurotus*

To make a spore print, cut off the stem so the cap can lay flat. Then put it gills-side down on a piece of paper. (I used a grocery bag, not white paper, because I expected a white spore print). Cover it with a glass or bowl to reduce air flow and wait up to 24 hours for the spores to drop.

populinus fruits on dead aspen trees. It is the whiter and softer of two oyster mushrooms common to the Rocky Mountains. The other, *Pleurotus pulmonarius*, is found on dead cottonwoods or other deciduous trees at lower elevations, and the cap color is often tan to light brown in color.

Major identifying features of oyster mushrooms include the fact that they grow on dead wood—whether a standing dead tree, stump, or buried log. Their gills are decurrent—a mycology term meaning they run from the underside of the cap down the stalk. They generally do not grow as solitary

mushrooms, but instead in shelving clusters. Again, if you make a spore print with an oyster mushroom—which can be done by cutting off the stem and laying the mushroom on a dark piece of paper, covered with a glass or bowl to reduce air flow, up to 24 hours—it will leave a print that is white to lilac in color. Many authors describe fresh oysters as having an anise-like scent that is pleasant but difficult

Oyster mushroom gills are decurrent, meaning they run down the stem. Here I have cut off much of the stem, but you can see where the gills run down the part that remains. Oyster mushroom gills have smooth margins, not serrated like mushrooms of the genus Lentinellus.





to preserve when cooking, though I don't personally have the nose for it.

Curiously, oyster mushrooms are carnivores, Gary Lincoff writes in *The Complete Mushroom Hunter* (2010). They grow through wood, searching for tiny nematodes and bacteria to digest for nitrogen. There are pictures of this by George Barron that can be viewed online.

Timing Oysters

In many regions, the season for oysters is long, unlike more ephemeral mushrooms with a limited window. "The nearest thing there is to a year-round mushroom is the oyster mushroom," writes Lincoff (2010). They love cool weather, so the height of the season varies by region. In Texas, winter is the prime time, my friend Merriwether

*These oysters are likely to be the low-country, cottonwood-loving variety, *P. pulmonarius*. We believe that to be a cottonwood stump, as it was situated in a row of cottonwoods lining the trail. In our region, the cottonwood-loving oyster is often more brown in tone, in contrast to its aspen-loving, high elevation neighbor.*

reports. In California—where they fruit on cottonwood, willow, alder, oak, tanoak, orchard trees, and occasionally conifers—they can be found in fall and winter on the coast, and spring and fall inland, according to Arora (1991). “Winter oysters are particularly good eating because they are much firmer than summer oysters, and much less likely to be full

I didn't just forage oyster mushrooms in the rain that one July day. I went back with Gregg the next day, after the rain, and continued to find them.

of bugs,” comments Lincoff, who is based in the Northeast. Even oysters found frozen on a stump can still be good to eat if they look fresh, he writes.

Up here in Colorado’s high reaches, there’s just too much cold for winter oysters, but cool rainy periods during our short “warm” season are good times to look. Hence my July luck, which I expect to last through fall this year since the weather has been so wet.

Oyster mushrooms are known to fruit over and





These I found fruiting on a charred log at a campground in East Vail, Colorado.

over again in the same spot, so if you know when a mushroom is flushing, it's a great time to find new patches, comments Richard Dean Robbins of the Western Montana Mycological Association (montanamushrooms.com). For this reason, some people take home "mushroom logs" from the forest, in the hopes they'll produce oyster mushrooms year after year.

Foraging Oysters from the Grocery Store

Oyster mushrooms are not only found in the wild; they can also be found in the grocery store,

especially in recent years with the increase in commercial oyster mushroom production.

Gregg's parents once gifted us a fantastic bunch of lemon-yellow oyster mushrooms from a local Colorado grower. These were golden oysters (*Pleurotus citrinopileatus*), which have escaped cultivation in some regions. Marketplace oyster mushrooms may appear different because of the ratio of carbon dioxide to oxygen in which they are grown, Lincoff notes (2010), naming white trumpets and king oysters

as other cultivated varieties. Growing kits can be purchased from a number of vendors online.

A couple years ago, my better half came home with a basket of white oyster mushrooms from a local grocery store. Cleaning and preparing them helped me to know what I was looking for in the wild, not to mention how to cook them once I got so lucky. The store-bought ones were small and somewhat yellowed on the underside with age, compared to the big, fresh beauties I would later find. But they were helpful in developing pattern recognition for my search nonetheless.

*Gosh those are some perky oyster mushrooms.
A work of art. Photo by Gregg Davis.*

Hunting Cottonwood Oysters

Hunting oysters in Colorado's "low country" means looking among the cottonwoods, often in cool spring and fall weather. But the cottonwood-loving *P. pulmonarius* can also be found in summer as you climb to higher elevations, as long as there are still cottonwoods growing there.

P. pulmonarius has off-white, pinkish, to brownish gray caps that are oyster-shaped, nearly plane at maturity, and often indented toward the stalk, writes Vera Stucky Evenson, curator of the Denver Botanic Gardens' Sam Mitchel Herbarium of Fungi in her new book,





Young cottonwood-oysters often have an inrolled cap, Evenson writes. These are from the fantastic stump flush pictured on the previous page.

Mushrooms of the Rocky Mountain Region (2015). They have a smooth cap edge that may be inrolled when young. The gills are crowded and run down the stem—unless there's no stem at all. If there is a stem, it may be hairy or tough and ridged below where the gills end, a characteristic that surprised me at first, as I had been expecting the gills to run the whole way down the stalk.

P. pulmonarius has been collected in cold, late March weather in Wyoming, and the Denver Botanic Gardens has specimens found as late as December in Denver, Evenson writes (2015). For her region around 6,000 feet north of Denver, my friend Butter reports finding them in winter during the drought years, each time

after a snowfall followed by more dry weather.

Hunting oysters in the Denver area with Butter involves driving, biking, or hiking to known oyster-producing cottonwood stumps to see if they are flushing, and cutting off the freshest ones with a pocket knife. On my own, I've found "low country" oysters in May on downed cottonwoods in a ditch east of Denver, and on standing dead cottonwoods in Fort Collins. I found what I believe to be cottonwood-oysters at 9,600 feet too, growing fresh and plump on a suspected cottonwood stump along an old mining road in July.

P. pulmonarius will fruit on conifers too—primarily spruce and fir during wet, cool weather in April and June and sometimes again in fall—according to Evenson (2015). Butter reports getting two small flushes after "seeding" a lodgepole pine log around her garden.



Oyster Lookalikes

There are plenty of white, gilled mushrooms that grow directly from dirt which are not oyster mushrooms—unless they only appear to be growing from dirt but are instead growing from a log under the soil, in which case you should probably steer clear anyway, unless you are a practiced mushroom hunter. Generally speaking, any white gilled mushroom growing directly from the ground can be considered an inedible lookalike for the sake of safe oyster hunting. Similarly, not all mushrooms that grow on wood are good to

Some oyster mushrooms appear to be growing from the ground. Such was the case with these. But I dug into the dirt and found they were growing from a fairly sizeable log beneath the surface. Some oyster lookalikes grow directly from the ground, so it makes sense to aim for mushrooms growing from stumps or standing dead instead.

eat, although you might have heard otherwise. There are certainly poisonous or inedible mushrooms that grow from wood.

Among the oyster lookalikes that grow on wood are angel wings (*Pleurocybella porrigens*), which are common in northern California and the Pacific Northwest, Arora writes (1991). These white mushrooms have decurrent gills and grow in shelves on dead trees, but they are thinner than oysters and generally grow on conifers. Many field guides list them as edible, writes David Spahr at mushroom-collecting.com, though reports of poisonings have led him to recommend avoiding them.

Mushrooms of the genus *Crepidotus* also grow on wood. They look a bit like oysters in form, but they are smaller and produce a brown spore print. Most *Crepidotus* species are stemless. They can grow singly, in small groups, or together in clusters. The edibility status of this genus is reported to be unknown; therefore, several authors recommend against eating them.

Another group that might confuse is *Lentinellus*. These tough mushrooms grow on wood too, but their gills are saw-toothed, compared to the smooth gills of oysters. They reportedly have a very bitter flavor, unlike the mild, anise-like flavor of oysters. "They say it is 'the only mushroom that raccoons will spit out,'" writes Thomas Volk, biology professor at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse (2003). Spahr groups *Lentinus* and *Lentinellus* together in the oyster-lookalike discussion, noting that they "are tough and have hairy brown caps, an off smell and a bad taste" compared to the "lovely aroma" of fresh, young oysters. For the Rockies, Evenson (2015) reports three species

of *Lentinus* (now classified under *Neolentinus* and *Heliocybe*) that grow on or near dead wood. They have gills that range from adnate ("broadly attached to the stalk over most of the gills' height") to slightly decurrent. These don't look much like oysters to me, but I include them in the interest of being thorough.

Similarly, in *Mushrooms Demystified* (1986), Arora mentions members of the genus *Clitocybe* as possible lookalikes to oysters. Some have slightly decurrent or long decurrent gills, and make white spore prints. However, they generally grow from soil or decomposing vegetation, and have a relatively central stem. Some of the *Clitocybes*, such as *C. dealbata*, are considered poisonous due to the toxin muscarine.

Last, the jack o'lantern mushrooms *Omphalotus nidiformis*, a white species found in Australia and Japan, and *O. olivascens*, an orange species found in North America, could be considered toxic lookalikes, although the latter might be more easily confused with chanterelles than oysters due to its color.

Elm Oyster on a Boxelder

Gregg and I found another lookalike one May day in Fort Collins while looking for low-country oysters along a creek. The white, shelf-like fungus looked kind of like an oyster, but it was fruiting by its lonesome from a branch scar on a live boxelder (*Acer negundo*). The stem was oriented more to the middle of the mushroom than is customary for oysters, and the gills were not decurrent. We took it home for a spore print, which revealed creamy white pores.

The mushroom fit the description for an "elm oyster" (*Hypsizygus ulmarius*), which grows on the scars of living hardwoods,



An oyster-like mushroom growing from a live boxelder tree turned out to be an elm oyster. They also grow on elm.

generally elm or boxelder, Ron Meyers explains at mushroomexpert.com. It often grows solitary, but can grow in groups of two or three. Although he notes that elm oysters are widespread in the eastern U.S., they are thought to be rare in Colorado, according to the Colorado Mycological Society (cms.org). Members of the group found one growing up a tree in Denver

City Park in 2012. "I believe this is the first time that *Hypsizygus ulmarius* has been documented in Colorado!" the newsletter, *Spores Afield*, enthuses. Next time I will know better and collect the specimen for the herbarium.

Elm oysters are edible, though they are said to be tougher than oysters. I didn't mind the texture one bit.

High Country Oysters

The mushrooms I found in the July rainstorm that inspired this lengthy diatribe were the

so-called "aspen oysters" (*P. populinus*), which grow on aspen in the high country. They are whiter and droopier than their low-country cousins, and their caps are not very brown, if at all. They are strictly a northern species, Evenson writes (2015), found also on black cottonwood in other montane and northern regions, including Alaska.

If I'm lucky enough to find a good batch, I collect the freshest, newest shelves, giving each a good tap, gill-side down, to release any shiny

*Three and a half pounds of oyster mushrooms.
Not bad for an hour's "work."*

black beetles that might be hunkered up therein. Back at home, each oyster gets a good spray-and-rub under the faucet, even though some people recommend against washing mushrooms, lest they get soggy. I find it's far quicker and easier than brushing and cleaning with knife and cloth. Then I sandwich them between two dish towels to pat dry before cooking.

Some mushrooms will have tiny white wiggling worms in them, which doesn't bother me too much unless it seems like a big infestation. In which case, I cut out the wormiest sections with a paring knife. The colonies are generally largest





*Two varieties of oyster suspected—the cottonwood-lover *P. pulmonarius* at left, the aspen-lover *P. populinus* at right.*

near the stem and adjacent cap bit, which is the toughest part anyway. Parts I don't use get toted to the aspen grove in back of our house, to be rubbed on dead and dying aspens in the hopes of producing a future flush.

Taste Test

At one point I had what I thought to be cottonwood-oysters and aspen-oysters in my refrigerator at the same time, so I ventured a

taste test. I prepared them in separate pans the same way—combining a suggestion from a FB friend to sprinkle on a mix of crushed fennel, coriander, smoked paprika, and salt with some “wild oregano” (*Monarda fistulosa*), then cook them whole in olive oil until toasty. Both came out excellent. I won't hesitate to make them the same way again—but the strong spices did not exactly help us distinguish between flavors.

Butter said she finds the high-country, aspen-associated oysters to be the tenderer of the two, even when older. At the same time, she finds them less flavorful than the low-country,

cottonwood-associated oysters in her back yard. “I think of oyster mushrooms as a workhorse mushroom,” she said. “Unlike some of the other choice edibles, their flavor isn’t so delicate that you have to worry about masking it in a recipe, so they substitute well for button mushrooms. Their other great advantage is that flushes can be quite big, which means you can actually put some up. I prefer to dry sauté, add a smidge of

Thanks to Maria on FB for suggesting a spice mix, and that I fry up the oysters until good and toasty. We were pretty excited about how these turned out.

butter, then freeze them.”

Normally I fall back on the same tried-and-true recipe—dipping oyster mushrooms in flour and frying them in butter such that they taste, well, buttery and fried, with a nice, mushroomy texture and flavor. Butter adds salt, pepper, and onion powder to her flour mix for this preparation, with good results. Other authors recommend broiling, roasting, or grilling the caps.

This year I had success with oyster mushroom stroganoff at the suggestion of another FB friend. My take involved adapting a simple





My first oyster mushroom stroganoff came out great. It was nothing fancy—just a simple recipe, doctored with what I had on hand. Fancy is lovely but not always necessary when the wild ingredients are so divine.

online recipe from Williams-Sonoma using ingredients I had on hand, including leftover steak. To replicate, start by cooking pasta, then set it aside. Next, sauté 2 pounds of sliced mushrooms in olive oil with shallots. (I used garlic in place of shallots, along with a handful of finely chopped salsify buds, leaves,

and stems). Once the mushrooms are soft, add a couple teaspoons flour, toss to coat, pour in some splashes of white wine and veggie broth, a pat of butter, and the bits of steak, then cook a few minutes more until the sauce is thick. Last, remove the mixture from the heat, mix in 1/2 cup sour cream, and toss with the pasta, splashing in more hot water as needed to loosen the sauce. It turned out totally yummy, one of those rare dishes that inspire Gregg to repeatedly look up at me from his food in

disbelief while he dines.

Thanks to Oysters

Our summer rainstorms tend to come down in gushing, hail-ridden tirades, but they don't always last that long. Thus while headed home from my most recent oyster adventure I was only halfway across the park—the high-elevation expanse of grassland that separates two mountain ranges—when I found myself back in the sun.

The park is spectacular after a rain—the sky impossibly blue, green mountains glowing, spots of mist and fog clearing to reveal sunshine so

close that you might get sucked up into the sky by its golden rays, never to return again. When everyone else is still closed up snug in their homes for the rainy weather, I know I have oyster mushrooms to thank for this vista.



Somebody just couldn't stop taking pictures of this mushroom, with good reason. Photo by Gregg Davis.





A Tale of Four Daisies By WFG

My class and I were invited to forage some edible noxious weeds on a public trail in Breckenridge, Colorado. We saw no signs of herbicide spraying there, and I have seen none in past years at that spot, so a couple of us took home nice bags of budding ox-eye daisies (*Leucanthemum vulgare*), each with a still-thick head of greens.

In this part of the Colorado high country

Daisy flowers make a lovely salad garnish, though I'll admit that after choking down a whole flower, I cut the rest into bits.

where I live we have two daisies that are considered to be noxious or harmful weeds. Both the ox-eye daisy and the chamomile daisy are on List B of Colorado's noxious weed list.

Crazy Daisies are Gross

The more widespread of the two noxious daisies in Summit and Park counties is the chamomile daisy, also known as mayweed or



scentless daisy (*Tripleurospermum inodorum* syn. *Matricaria inodora*, *M. perforata*). My friend Nick, who is a landscaper, calls it "crazy daisy." The crazy daisy has classic daisy flowers with a yellow center and white petals (ray florets). The leaves are frilly or finely divided and quite emerald green when young.

The "crazy" or chamomile daisy has frilly leaves along its sturdy, tall stems. High country dwellers, look around. This daisy is all over town.

After the rosette stage, they bolt tall and proud on sturdy stems.

"All parts are edible except mature roots," Cattail Bob Seebeck writes of the crazy



daisy in his *Survival Plants* textbook (2012), though he recommends against the roots due to toughness. I have nibbled the greens many times in the hopes of finding some superb use for this invasive species. To this day, however, I find them impossibly bitter at all stages of development, even pickled. The flowers are okay, however.

If you are hoping to try this at home nonetheless, note that folks who have sensitive skin sometimes get a reaction when weeding chamomile daisies without gloves. Such individuals should of course proceed with care in touching them, let alone eating them. The chamomile daisy, along with its similar, “scented” relative *Anthemis cotula*—which is listed as edible but earns a low edibility rating of “1” from *Plants for a Future* (pfaf.org)—may cause reactions similar to hay fever in sensitive people.

Chamomile daisies are

These emerald beauties are young crazy daisy greens in spring. They certainly look appetizing, but my taste buds continue to object to their bitter flavor.



found in pretty much any and all disturbed locations up here, particularly roadsides and recent past construction projects. They are quite pernicious and pushy, navigating their way into many landscapes, though they do serve a role in adding biomass to lands laid bare by human hand.

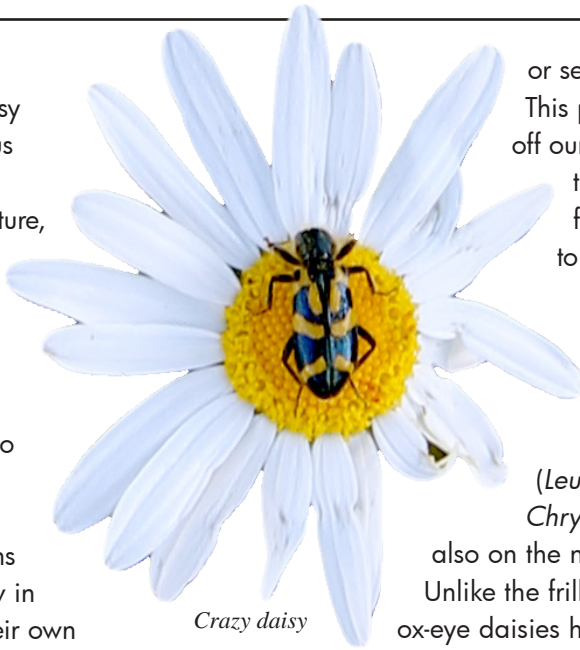
You might notice chamomile daisies that have been sprayed with herbicides. This year for the first time we have some in front of the

Crazy daisies are considered a noxious weed in Colorado, particularly in the high country. But they certainly do lay down some biomass where other plants won't go.

college where I teach. The sprayed daisies are unmistakable in their various stages of torture and death, hues ranging from green to brown and white as their stems curl grotesquely inward upon themselves. These should not be eaten for obvious reasons. The State of Colorado

mandates control of chamomile daisy and other “noxious weeds” deemed harmful to agriculture, ranchland, or native ecosystems. There is a three-tiered list from the worst offenders (List A) to lesser offenders (List C). Local counties and towns implement the law in accordance to their own management plans, which generally involves herbicide applications.

Mechanical removal is another option, provided you pull them before they go to flower



Crazy daisy

or seed so they can't reproduce. This point is a reminder to brush off our pants and shoes if we walk through a field of noxious daisy flowers, before treading onward to native landscapes.

Ox-eye Daisies are Good Eatin'

Ox-eye daises

(*Leucanthemum vulgare* syn.

Chrysanthemum leucanthemum) are

also on the noxious weed list in Colorado.

Unlike the frilly leaves of chamomile daisies, ox-eye daisies have thicker, dark green, lobed leaves. Those on the basal rosette are spoon-

Top: Chamomile daisies aren't so bad. Insects make use of them, at least. **Bottom:** Yummy ox-eye daisy greens, young stems, and flower buds.





shaped—narrow and elongated down low, then widening toward the tip, with scalloped or shallowly lobed margins. The stem leaves that develop later tend to be smaller, with lobes or teeth that can be thin, short, and widely spaced into funny little nubbins. The leaves are borne alternately along the stalk.

Many people like ox-eye daisies—after all, they do make pretty flowers. So they plant or encourage them in their landscapes, and the daisies spread. High country folks looking to brighten their yards with daisies' cheer should

Ox-eye daisy rosette greens. I foraged these from Steamboat Springs, Colorado, in fall.

look instead to native daisies (*Erigeron* spp.), black-eyed susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*), and blanket flower (*Gaillardia aristata*), Summit County's Weed Guide recommends.

I subjected the ox-eye daisies we got from the weed pull—which had already bolted but still sported leafy foliage, not to mention soft stems and flower buds—to many kitchen experiments, as I rarely get such a large bunch



of them. I stripped the leaves and buds into salads, served them atop tacos, and added them to stir fries. I chopped them fine into a potato salad, and sautéed them in bacon fat to have first on an egg sandwich and later a tortilla pizza constructed with piles of yummy browned sausage. Oxeye daisies have a strong

A chef in a field of flowers. The basal leaves of these ox-eye daisies make fine green fare, especially before or after flowering when the rosettes are flourishing.

and unique, somewhat sweet flavor that I like sparingly in mild dishes, en masse balanced by other strong-flavored ingredients.

The field behind Beano's Cabin in Beaver

Creek where our friend Bill Greenwood is chef is covered in ox-eye daisies. It makes for a pretty sight when they're in bloom, but the best time to gather them for food is before they flower, when they are still in their low rosettes, but at their green-foliage peak. In late summer to fall, after the flowers have died and fallen

away, more good basal rosette greens emerge. I like to take home a bag full each time I visit.

It's nice to have fresh ox-eye daisy greens on hand. They have some substance to them,

*Pad-thai kissed with ox-eye daisy greens, not bad.
Just remember to taste first, and go easy on the
daisy leaves if necessary.*



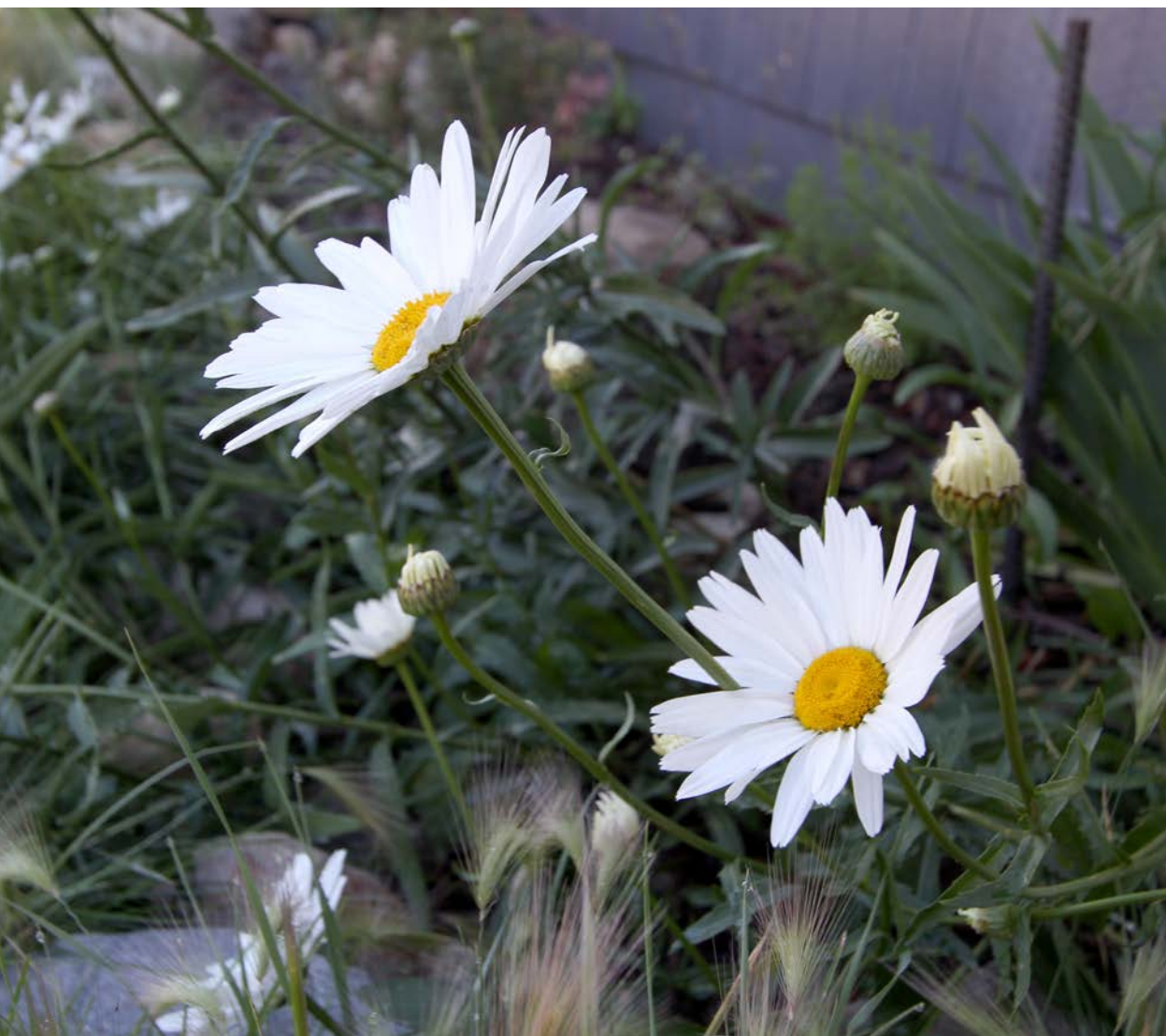
unlike all the frilly silliness of their chamomile cousins. Plus it's nice to think you're helping out with an ecological issue when you forage this free organic fare.

Eat Your Garden Daisies

You might be surprised to learn that even the common Shasta daisy (*Leucanthemum* × *superbum*)—a hybrid created by Luther Burbank's cross-breeding experiments, now

widely used in landscaping—is edible. There are numerous cultivars available. The one in my back yard has more substantial leaves than ox-eye daisies, some with a serrated edge so neat they look like they have been trimmed with fine pinking shears. The stem leaves get long and lance-shaped, with serrated

Shasta daisies were bred for larger flowers. They are not invasive in nature, and make a good landscaping plant. Plus, you can eat them.





or toothed edges. Shasta daisy flower heads are bigger than those of ox-eye daisy, with which they might most readily be confused. The greens are easy to throw into a dish, especially if they grow in your garden. My favorite preparation so far has been to serve them warm and slightly wilted, cut rough with dandelion greens and chopped walnuts, and tossed in a chile-infused, oil-vinegary yucca flower antipasto. Like ox-eye daisy greens,

Top: A Shasta daisy's thick, serrated leaves and flowerbud. Right: At a younger stage, the leaves almost look as if they've been cut with pinking shears.





Shasta daisy greens have a strong and unique flavor, so it's best to taste before you waste. I like them shredded into thin ribbons and incorporated into salads with other greens too.

You Say Wild Chamomile, I Say Pineappleweed

There's yet another daisy-like plant you might know but not tend to notice unless you're looking for it. It hangs around the edges of sidewalks and parking lots, and can also be used for

Pineappleweed has disk flowers but no ray flowers, making it look like a tiny daisy without the petals.

food. This low-growing plant is pineappleweed, also known as "false chamomile" or "wild chamomile" (*Lepidothea suaveolens* syn. *Matricaria discoidea*). It looks a lot like the crazy daisy with its frilly foliage, but instead of having full daisy heads, it makes pineapple-shaped clusters of disk flowers only, such that it looks like a tiny conical daisy without the white petals.

If you crush these flower heads between your fingers you get a pineapple-like aroma.

Or, some recognize an olfactory similarity to chamomile, to which wild chamomile is related. This flower head is the part commonly used—whether raw in salads or steeped for tea. The frilly leaves are pretty and edible too. They lend a nice visual character to a dish—but go easy, as they are rather bitter.

I have made salad dressings and infused vodkas with pineappleweed flowers, with good results. Melany Vorass Herrera includes

a recipe for pineappleweed sugar cookies in her book, *The Front Yard Forager* (2014). Pineappleweed is not a noxious weed list species in my state, but it does have weedy tendencies, following humans around wherever we wreak havoc on the environment. It's best to seek out a clean location if you

Many people use the flower heads but leave the bitter foliage behind.





plan to eat them—a spot not trodden by too many feet, or situated next to a busy road.

A Tale of 10,000 Daisies

I have not done an actual count of how many edible daisies and daisy-like flowers there are. The number 10,000 is an exaggerated estimate, to which I am prone. But there are many more, in the Aster family, that are edible. Get excited, people. The buck so does not stop here.



Wild Eats



Chanterelle Skillet Toast

By Wendy Petty

When you are in possession of one of the most heavenly foods on the planet, the directive is clear: keep it simple. In the past, I've been guilty of ignoring this advice. Yep, I made a chanterelle cake. I'll tell you, though, these golden girls are officially my favorite food. I'm done messing around with them, doing things that mask or dull their flavor.

I believe this is the ultimate recipe for serving chanterelles, even better than the classics like pasta and risotto. More a technique than an actual recipe, it yields a final dish that lets chanterelles stand alone on a pedestal. On my last day, if someone could please slip a plate of chanterelle skillet toast into my hands, I'd die with a smile arching my lips.

Ingredients:

Chanterelles, cleaned and torn into bite-sized pieces

Day-old sourdough bread, cut into thick slices

Butter & salt

Below: WFG's rendition of Butter's recipe. Super yum.



Instructions:

1. Using a heavy-bottomed dry skillet, heat a single layer of chanterelles over medium heat until they begin to exude their juices.
2. Add a sprinkling of salt, and a fat knob of butter to the pan.
3. As soon as the butter has melted, scoot the mushrooms to the edges of the skillet, and place the bread slices into the warm buttery juices, making certain there are no mushrooms underneath.
4. Let the bread brown on both sides, then dump the whole mess out onto a plate. It ain't pretty, but it sure is good.



Wilted Shasta Daisy Greens with Yucca Petals By WFG

Daisy and dandelion greens each have a strong flavor. This recipe balances those flavors with each other and an antipasto made of yucca flower petals (*Yucca glauca*) marinated in vinegar or lemon juice, crushed chiles, and olive oil. Other tart, oil-based antipastos can substitute if you don't have yucca. If you do have yucca in bloom, search "yucca" at hungerandthirstforlife.blogspot.com for Butter's recipe, which forms a nice basis for this one.



Ingredients:

- 3 cups rough-chopped Shasta daisy and dandelion greens
- 1/4 cup yucca (or other) antipasto including splashes of oil and liquid from the jar
- 3 Tbsp chopped walnuts

Instructions:

1. Wash greens. To get them extra clean, soak for 10 minutes in water with a splash

I liked the added lemon squeeze when I used Butter's recipe for a base. When I used a traditional pickling recipe with vinegar, it was tart enough that it didn't require more acid.

2. Toss with yucca and walnuts, and a splash of lemon for tartness to taste.
3. Bake for 10 minutes in a 350-degree (F) oven to wilt the greens, stirring once around 5 minutes. Serves 2.



Pineappleweed Spicy Dipping Sauce

By WFG

Ingredients:

- 1/4 cup sour cream
- 1/4 cup mayonnaise
- 3 Tbsp pineappleweed heads
- 1 tsp chile pepper
- 1 tsp dried garlic flakes
- Salt

Instructions:

1. Fine-chop pineappleweed heads. No need to get crazy separating heads from greens; it's okay to leave some greens in there.
2. Mix ingredients together, including salt to taste. For the chile pepper, I ground up some dried Japonese chiles.
3. Let sit 20 minutes until garlic flakes soften.
4. Serve with something fried, or tortilla chips. I served mine with breaded-and-fried puffball mushroom slices. My better half was quite pleased.



It will be fun to experiment with different types of dried chiles in this basic recipe. The pineappleweed's tart astringency works with the chiles nicely, at least Gregg and I thought so.

