

Fall is the Mushroom Season

By Carole Maes



Fall is a beautiful season, and we never miss the chance to go for a walk in the forests of Macedonia's mountains: Mavrovo, Pelister, Solunska Glava, Ljuboten, to name just a few. These walks allow us to breathe pure air, to admire the wonderful colours that fall brings and, last but not least, to find delicious mushrooms.

Horns of Plenty, Chanterelles, Ceps and Wood Hedgehogs growing in Macedonia are among the top edible mushrooms one can find anywhere on earth. We haven't been able to find any morels yet but we do not despair.

These top mushrooms have different habitats and fruiting seasons. The Cep is the first you will find from the beginning of September and the Horn of Plenty would be the last one you could find till end of November if the weather is not too cold and dry.

Mushrooms such as Chanterelles, Horns of Plenty and Wood hedgehogs are easy to spot as they grow in troops. Once you spotted one, a basketful can be picked from a small area. For the Ceps, the task is harder as they fruit individually. You will generally find those mushrooms in leaf-litter or moss-rich woodlands.

Before eating your harvest, you will of course have to double check if you have correctly identified all the mushrooms, as some mushrooms are poisonous and even deadly poisonous. Horns of Plenty are easy to identify, because these mushrooms have a unique black colour and are shaped like a trumpet. Chanterelles may be confused with the Jack-o'-Lantern which is vividly orange and thicker. For the Wood Hedgehogs, the recommendation is to harvest young specimens as the flesh of older and bigger mushrooms can be bitter. Ceps are part of a huge family including top



edible, moderately edible and poisonous mushrooms, such as Devil's Bolete, Pretty Poison Bolete, Le Gal's Bolete, and Brick-cap Bolete. So inspect them carefully!

As we wish to preserve these mushrooms species and ensure that they will be present for future generations, here is a quick tip on harvesting them: always cut them with a knife at the base and avoid picking the very young specimens.

Finally, before eating your mushrooms, you must wash them very gently and rapidly in cold water. You could simply saute them with butter or olive oil and garlic for few minutes in a pre-heated pan. With Ceps, you may make a nice

carpaccio with a drizzle of good olive oil and parmesan or a very nice soup. If you want to preserve some, just freeze them fresh.

And if you are ready to go mushroom hunting, my last recommendation will be to have a look at this very informative report on mushrooms in Mavrovo: <http://www.oxfamitalia.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/Final-report.pdf>.

Should you wish to enjoy some mushrooms without getting out into the woods, check out your local supermarket or order them online from companies like Bimfood from Prilep.

