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Eat This One, Not That

Western Pennsylvania man spreads his zeal for mushroom foraging

by Mark Kramer, photographs courtesy of Adam Haritan

"THIS IS THE CHANTERELLE MUSHROOM." A wide-eyed, blond-haired man with dual black earplugs flashes two handfuls of orange fungi before the camera. "*Cantharellus lateritius*," he explains, "is a delicious, wild, edible fungus that can be found growing during

state. He is helping to cultivate a growing movement of plant and mushroom foragers who are exploring—and, in some cases harvesting—Pennsylvania's forests.

Wild Edibles

A PRODUCT OF PITTSBURGH'S South Hills, the 33-year-old explains he "wasn't raised as a wild child." About a decade ago, he began studying healthy food, and each tweak to his diet led him to edibles growing wild in the woods.

In fact, foraging and nature education have become a passion and obsession to the point that he says, "I feel like I can't keep it to myself. I have to share it with other people."

And share he has. His videos have each garnered hundreds of thousands of views—his exploration of nettles, chicken of the woods mushrooms and morels have been particularly popular—and he has more than 32,000 Facebook and 10,000 Instagram followers.

He can also be found in the field from late March to early December when he hosts talks and guided hikes at state parks and nature preserves, as well as for private events. Many of his presentations carry a fee, though sponsoring agencies make it possible for him to offer some for free. Most participants are new to foraging.

"We're just here to appreciate and talk about nature," Haritan says. "I think people are looking for some kind of guide to show them things that they're not normally seeing."

In addition to plant and fungus identification, he often discusses an area's history and geology.

Foraging 'Shrooms

HARITAN RECOMMENDS THAT FORAGERS always seek permission to hunt and harvest, whether they're on state-owned or private land or at a county park or nature reserve. They should also un-



Mushroom forager and teacher Adam Haritan shares his knowledge of the fungus's habitat and types through hands-on walks in the forest. He's also published many videos and photos on YouTube and social media.

the summer months mycorrhizally [symbiotically] in association with various hardwood trees."

Over the next 12 minutes, he leads viewers along wooded hillsides while zealously differentiating the "smooth" chanterelle from poisonous look-a-likes and examining cap shapes, colors, stems, spore prints and micro-climates.

This is Adam Haritan, and through his Learn Your Land venture, he has produced more than 100 instructional videos for some 77,000 YouTube subscribers and leads walks and workshops for small groups throughout the





derstand how regulations that apply to particular areas and species can vary widely for personal and commercial foraging.

Unlike digging up a plant, mushrooms can be harvested regularly as the “fruit” of a fungus.

“It’s kind of like picking an apple on the apple tree,” he explains.

As a “public teacher,” Haritan is more willing than some mushroomers to share his favorite hotspots. He believes that foraging is easily sustained by Pennsylvania’s forests—which cover 58 percent of the commonwealth—and that foraging poses less of a threat to the state’s natural landscape than development and industry. Still, he recognizes that some plant species, such as ginseng and gold seal, have at times been overharvested for commercial use.

Recently, Haritan has been working on a mushroom video course that subscribers will be able to access for a fee. He also regularly concocts mushroom tinctures that he makes in small batches and sells on his website. He claims they provide antioxidants and a boost to the immune system.

Nature education certainly seems to have given Haritan a boost.

“Whenever I’m outside and whenever I’m in the woods, it just feels good,” he says.

Whether it’s through his classes, videos or walks in the forest, Haritan is eager to share that feeling with others.

“It’s important to interact with nature in a more intimate way, rather than acting as a passerby,” he says. 🍄

—Mark Kramer writes from Pittsburgh.

INTERESTED IN FORAGING?

Adam Haritan is one of about 800 members of the **Western Pennsylvania Mushroom Club**, which lists general rules for foraging on its website, wpamushroomclub.org.

Foragers can also participate in the **Central Pennsylvania Mushroom Club** and the **Eastern Penn Mushroomers**. centralpamushroomclub.com; epenmushroomers.org

For more information about Haritan and Learn Your Land, check out his website, learnyourland.com, or follow him on Facebook, [facebook.com/learnyourland](https://www.facebook.com/learnyourland) or Instagram, [instagram.com/learnyourland](https://www.instagram.com/learnyourland).

NOTE: Because of the poisonous nature of many mushrooms, anyone who decides to forage or participate with a local mushroomer group should exercise extreme caution and seek expert advice in identifying edible mushrooms.