

Mushroom Hunting

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Mushrooms grow all through the Connecticut woods. Some are good to eat. But some are poisonous. Native peoples learned which mushrooms were safe to eat. Connecticut tribes have harvested mushrooms for thousands of years.

Mushrooms are a type of fungus. Two common types are safe to eat. They are Hen of the Woods and Chicken of the Woods. Hen of the Woods are a grey-brown color. They look like a hen resting on the ground. Chicken of the Woods are an amazing orange color. They taste like chicken. Both mushrooms are filling. In recipes, they are a good substitute for meat.



Hen of the Woods and Chicken of the Woods are a seasonal food source. This means they can only be harvested from late summer until late fall. You can find them in hardwood forests, most often at the base of oak trees. They can grow from two pounds to 100 pounds in weight on a single tree!

Mushrooms need a lot of moisture. The perfect time for mushroom hunting is right after it rains. The mushrooms will absorb the rainwater. They will be full and plump.

Like most mushrooms, they grow very fast. If cut off the tree in the right way, they will grow back again. You will find them on the same tree year after year. For these reasons, tribes value them as a reliable food source.

These two types of mushroom are nutritious. They also have medicinal value. They help support the immune system. They are used in cancer research. They also lower blood sugar levels which can be helpful to people with diabetes.

The first step in preparing them to eat is to chop them up. They are then boiled to clean and soften them. Boiling also gives them a texture like chicken. They are then ready to use in soups or can be cooked over an open fire. The mushrooms can also be dried or preserved in oil for later use.

By gathering Hen and Chicken of the Woods each fall, Connecticut's Native Americans celebrate the bounty of the earth and continue the traditions of their ancestors.



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