

# MUSHROOM NEWSLETTER

15 September 2012



An encouraging haul gathered from the woods this morning

I wrote last week to announce the porcini were beginning to emerge and that the signs were promising. This is now official – Justin and I returned to the same woods and found even more mushrooms. To say it could be a really good season is courting disaster in the same way that you just knew this spring's hosepipe bans was asking for the wettest summer on record, but things really are promising. We also found a couple of death caps, but so far there's no sign of fly agaric. This could be a sign that the real explosion is yet to come.



There are a few death caps around . . .

I thought I would also take the opportunity to explain quickly how to preserve the haul. I personally reckon that eating fresh porcini is almost criminally wasteful – they taste much better when dried and in addition this way you can use them throughout the year.



A porcino showing the first signs of beetle attack (they start tunnelling at the base of the stalk) . . .

The other reason for drying is that at this time of year the mushrooms are almost inevitably carrying a cargo of tiny beetle larvae which quickly honeycomb the fungi. Drying not only halts this, but it kills and removes the insects (they shrivel up and fall out).



Trays of porcini drying on top of a wood burning oven . . .

Drying is easy providing one follows the basic rules of circulating as much dry air as possible around the mushrooms. Speed is of the essence, so larger mushrooms should be sliced thinly. The mushrooms should then be spread out across a wire rack or threaded on cotton, making sure the slices don't touch. They should then be placed above a gentle heat source – I put a baking rack on the stove and then stack trays made of wire mesh on top of this. Others use their airing cupboard or even a low-wattage incandescent lightbulb in a biscuit tin.

There are also desiccating machines on the market, but these tend to be geared towards drying more challenging produce such as meat, fruit and vegetables. As a result they can use too much heat, even at their lowest settings, and end up toasting the mushrooms.



The scenery can be spectacular at this time of year . . .

Finally, it's not too late to come on one of my forays over the next few weeks:

23, 29 and 30 September

6 and 13 October

Happy hunting!

Daniel Butler

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P.S. As always, let me know if you want to be removed from the list and I will do it forthwith.