



How Big Can a Puffball Get?



An 84-year-old mushroom picker became a social media sensation after finding a giant puffball in the woods. Don Smith was walking his daughter’s dog on his 100-acre property in North Dorchester, Ontario, Canada, when something caught his eye. It was a puffball that weighed 15.4 pounds and had a diameter of 20 inches. His daughter posted it on Facebook and overnight it was shared 2.600 times.

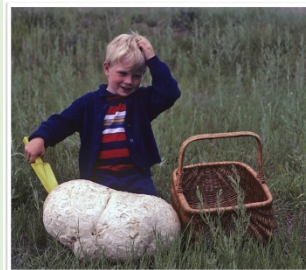
This is not the largest giant puffball found. According to a 2011 report from the London Free Press, someone picked an 18 pound puffball that was 59 inches in circumference. The Guinness Book of Records stated at that time the largest recorded puffball was 66.5 inches around and was found in the UK in October 2010.

Caramelized Puffball Butter Puree

This caramelized puree ends up being a little weird looking during the cooking process, but the end result is fantastic. Chief Alan Bergo cooked 25 pounds of puffballs down to about 2 quarts of puree. Once you make the puree the uses are limitless: sauces, soups, stuffing, and as a butter. The butter is good on steak.

Ingredients: 8 oz. puffball puree; ½ tsp. kosher salt; juice of one lemon plus lemon zest as desired; ¼ cup parsley; 8 oz. chilled, then diced unsalted butter, as needed; oil, as needed; warm water, as needed for pureeing.

Preheat oven to 300 degrees. Clean and peel the puffball(s), then chop them into 1 inch cubes. Put the chopped puffballs into a large stockpot, then add a cup or two of water so the puffballs don’t scorch on the bottom. Cover the pot, then turn the heat to medium, stirring occasionally, until the puffballs are wilted and have started to give up their water. varying shades of nasty looking blue and gray, exposed to moist heat.



occasionally, until the puffballs are By now the puffballs will have turned but this is natural when they are

When the puffballs are wilted and soft, begin food processor to puree. If you have difficulty some warm water until the blades begin to smooth, transfer to a very wide pan that you’ve greased liberally with oil. Put the pan in the oven and cook, whisking every 15 minutes of so, until most of the water has evaporated and the mixture is browned and caramelized. Eventually the puree will break and end up looking like cooked ground beef.

transferring them to the bowl of the getting the puree to be smooth, add buzz it all up. Once the puree is

When the mushroom puree is nicely browned and evenly caramelized, remove the pan from the oven and allow the puffball matter to cool to room temperature. When the chilled butter has also come to room temperature, put both of them in batches in a food processor and process to combine. Only add small amounts, a tablespoon at a time, of the butter to the mushroom puree until a velvety puree is formed. Transfer this mixture to a mixing bowl and stir in the salt, lemon juice and zest, and parsley.

It is possible to over process the mixture if the puffball mixture is too warm or it’s processed too long. If that happens you can drain the butter from the mixture, cool the puffball puree, and repeat the process with some more chilled butter. Form the puffball butter into a 1-inch log and wrap in plastic wrap or put in a container with a tight fitting lid. Then label, date, and refrigerate. It can also be frozen and is especially good later if vacuum packed. This

recipe is a concentrate so it often needs to be cut with something such as a little more butter before using. (from the *Forager Chef* by Alan Bergo); photo by H. Barnhart



Fungi Discovered in the Amazon Will Eat Your Plastic

The Amazon is home to more species of mushrooms than almost anywhere else on earth. One of them appears to be quite happy eating plastic. Plastic persists for generations unless something eats it. The fungi, *Pestalotiopsis microspora*, is the first anyone has found to survive on a steady diet of polyurethane alone, and even more surprising, it does this in an oxygen-free environment such as at the bottom of a landfill. In the

future our trash compactors may simply be giant fields of voracious fungi. (from *1 Minute Read* by Michael J. Coren)

The Mighty Oyster Mushroom: The Workhorse of Gourmet Fungi

Of all mushrooms commonly consumed, oyster mushroom in the genus *Pleurotus* stand out as exceptional ones. They enjoy a reputation as the easiest to cultivate, richly nutritious, and medicinally supportive. Oyster mushrooms are renowned for their ability to degrade environmental toxins, particularly hydrocarbon-based contaminants.

Oyster mushrooms are native to both deciduous hardwood and conifer tree species. Recognized as wood decomposers, they are ubiquitous in forestlands around the world. Fruiting both in the spring and fall, called *Pleurotus (ostreatus) populinus* if growing on cottonwood trees or *Pleurotus pulmonarius* if growing on cultivation it can grow readily on dead wood, straw, grasses fescues, corn, bamboo) cotton, cacti, Scotch broom, hemp, products and practically any other dried cellulosic plant material.

Worms do not eat *Pleurotus*, but instead this mushroom eats the toxin that stuns the worm, whereupon the mycelium invades its orifices. The mycelium can also consume some bacteria in order to obtain protein. This mushroom can inhibit such nasty bacteria as *Staphylococcus aureus*, and *E. coli*.



world. Fruiting both in growing on aspen and hardwoods. For (wheat, rye, rice, coffee wastes, paper

worms. It exudes a body through its to their nitrogen and *Pseudomonas*,

It is important to always cook Oyster mushrooms. They contain a heat-labile, hemolytic protein called ostreolysin that can be toxic unless the mushroom is cooked at temperatures exceeding 140 degrees Fahrenheit. This compound is found in developing and mature oyster mushrooms yet is absent in the mycelium. (from the Blog at *The Huffington Post* 2013); photo by Freeman Rowe.

Illustrations from the Toadstool Lady



To her neighbors in 19th century Baltimore, Mary Banning (1822-1903) was considered a witch-like toadstool lady known for boarding trolley cars with her arms full of slimy, putrid-smelling mushroom specimens. Many Americans once regarded mushrooms as unsightly and uniformly poisonous. Mycology, the study of fungi, was no pastime for a woman.

Mary Banning would identify 23 new species and complete one of the first guides to the mushrooms of the New World, but almost no one in her day knew of her discoveries or about the beautiful illustrations she produced in her self-financed home laboratory. Mary devoted her life to mycology at a time when women in science faced as much resistance as mushrooms did in popular cuisine.

While most female artists sketched flowers, Mary's quest for lowly mushrooms got her labeled a lunatic. One man warned her, "you will poison yourself to death!" When he thought she was out of earshot, he grumbled, "Poor thing. She has clean gone mad!" And few scientists were willing to listen to a self-taught, female outsider.

A museum curator at the New York's State Museum, who became her closest confidante, did at least store her work but it would languish in a desk drawer for almost a century. It was not until the 1980s that another curator

of mycology at the museum unearthed her work where it had been stashed in a dusty, neglected drawer behind a case of taxidermied chickens. The vivid watercolors had somehow survived decades of neglect. Even though her works were finally put on display there, the curator could never find anyone to publish such lavish pieces. Mary had put them in a collection that she called “The Fungi of Maryland.” As mushroom hunting is growing in popularity today, it is hopeful that her beautiful watercolors can be brought back into view. (from Wikipedia)



Farmer Finds Massive Mushroom

Alan Smith also discovered a massive mushroom on his farm near Naracoorte in Australia. The giant *Phlebopus marginatus*, a member of the Bolete family, commonly known as a Salmon Gum among numerous other smaller mushrooms. It was



It was 18 inches across. It was absolutely huge, the stalk itself was a foot thick. “It could take your weight, you could sit on it easily,” Alan said. He stuck his hat on the cap of the mushroom to show the size of it in photos. Then he posted it on a Facebook group and found out it was eaten overseas in Asian countries. He also found out that they can grow up to 39 inches across and can weigh up to 132 pounds. He went back a few days later to have another look at his amazing find, but his cows had eaten it. (from www.naracoorteherald.com, by Isabella Hood)

his farm near Naracoorte member of the Bolete Mushroom, was growing around 15 inches high and

Another Rediscovered Collection of Mushrooms

UW-Madison has one of the world’s largest and oldest collections of fungus, but it wasn’t until recently that fungi collected by George Washington Carver, one of American’s most famous scientists, were accidentally rediscovered in decades-old cabinets on campus. Students at the University were in the process of doing a digital upgrade on about 120, 000 specimens when the Carver collection was discovered in an old wooden cabinet in the hallway where it had been for at least 50 years. It is thought that Carver most likely sent his samples to UW-Madison because of the herbarium’s reputation for excellence.

Carver was born a slave in Missouri in the early 1860s and became the first black student at what is now Iowa State University. The majority of his teaching and research years were at the Tuskegee Institute (now University) in Alabama where he taught African-Americans how to farm. He was a scientist and educator, but he best known for his research on peanuts. (from MushRumors, www.wildmushrooms.org, July/Aug 2016)

Avoid This Mushroom Mistake

There is a common mistake cooks often make when working with mushrooms. Don’t overcrowd the pan when you are cooking them. Taking that little extra time to cook your mushrooms in batches is really important. Your fungi have a lot of water content, so you need to leave enough space in the pan for all the excess moisture to evaporate. Crowding mushroom will leave them sad and soggy. And no one wants that, right? So do yourself and your fungi a favor. Cook mushrooms in batches. (from *The Tasting Table* by Alison Spiegel)

Know Your *Bovista* Puffballs

The *Bovista* puffballs are edible while the interior remains white and firm. They are not the most flavorful puffballs, but can be acceptable when properly seasoned. Far left: *Bovista plumbea*. Up to 4 cm wide. Usually too small for eating. (photo by H. Barnhart); Middle: *Bovista nigrescens*. up to 6 cm wide. (photo by C. Ardrey); Far right: *Bovista pila*. Up to 7 cm wide. (photo by C. Ardrey)

