

Chanterelles by Rebecca Lexa

Autumn will be upon us soon, good news for mushroom hunters! One of the most prized edible fungi of this region is the Pacific golden chanterelle. The fruiting body, or mushroom, of chanterelles are a bright golden yellow in color, easy to see against the dark green and brown forest floors they like best. They're shaped like trumpets, with a narrow base spreading out into a slightly concave flat cap, and they may grow alone or in clusters. They grow directly out of the ground, unlike their toxic look-alikes the jack o'lantern mushrooms, which grow on live or dead trees. Chanterelles do not have true gills on their undersides, but waxy ridges that seem to flow together near the base; these false gills may be golden to a pale pink in color. Their spore print is a pale yellow to white in color.

Look for chanterelles under conifer trees, especially Douglas fir, Sitka spruce and Western hemlock. You may have to look closely as they can be easily camouflaged by conifer needles and dirt. If you are 100% sure that you have a Pacific golden chanterelle, you can gently pick it by hand at the base. Take the largest ones you find and leave smaller ones to grow a little longer. Remember that you cannot take mushrooms or other natural things from Willapa National Wildlife Refuge. If you are going to go mushroom hunting on private property you need to get permission from the landowner first. If your hunt is successful, you can eat the mushrooms now or dry sauté and freeze them for later.