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My mondo mushroom

I continued to hack at it until it came away in chunks, yielding enough to nearly fill a plastic grocery sack, with a few bits of other vegetation and rocks attached.

When I recently moved into my new home, I discovered a large resident already in place.

I love mushrooms, but I didn't especially want one growing against the outside of my house. I prefer them in the dining

room, on plates.

Story and photos by Patricia Snyder

Actually, this one was about as wide as a plate.

Granted, my mondo mushroom was a wee thing compared to the 2,200-acre Humongous Fungus that lives underground in Eastern Oregon's Malheur National Forest, near Prairie City. But I still didn't want it.

Josephine County Master Gardeners don't address mushrooms, and neither would a U.S. Forest Service employee I contacted.

Amateur mushroom enthusiast Jim Porter said he'd take a look at my mushroom if I brought it over. It might be tasty, he suggested.

Porter is the sort of fellow one might find tapping on the door to ask if he can examine and pick your mushrooms.

Mushrooms can be tricky business,

because some varieties can hurt or kill a diner, he pointed out. Some even have telling names, such as "destroying angel" and "death cap."

Porter hunts only about 10 varieties, since he feels comfortable identifying them.

Soon it will be the season to harvest honey mushrooms, the same variety as the Humongous Fungus, believed to be the world's largest living organism by area.

Porter especially likes the oyster mushroom, which grows on dead wood such as fallen trees.

"It tastes like veal," he said.

If his lawn gets a crop of puffball mushrooms, Porter cuts them open to make sure they're all white inside. But he does have some fungi pop up where he'd prefer they not.

"There is no organic way to get rid of mushrooms," he noted. They love moisture, so not watering the lawn for a year or more might do the trick, but this solution may not appeal to the average gardener.

However, it's possible to fend off the fungi by feeding another desirable. He

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