

Come foraging with one of Boston's most prolific mushroom hunters

In preparation for a four-course Wild Mushroom Dinner, Tyler Akabane forages and fills a basket in the Lynn woods.

By **Isabella Bernstein** Globe Correspondent, Updated October 21, 2025, 12:00 p.m.



Tyler Akabane, who owns The Mushroom Shop in Somerville, poses for a portrait with a hen of the woods mushroom he found in Lynn. JESSICA RINALDI/GLOBE STAFF

Two tattooed eyes on Tyler Akabane's arms stare back at the group through the cloudy October sunlight. With a wicker basket looped under one arm, he trudges through woods

in Lynn in gray cargo shorts and a muted green T-shirt, stopping every so often to surveil the leaf-trodden ground below and the treetops above. Akabane and his group-shadow of six are on one mission: to find mushrooms.

[Akabane](#), 41, is a mushroom forager. For the past 13 years, he has dedicated his free time, and now his career, to mushrooms. He owns [The Mushroom Shop](#) in Somerville and hosts educational foraging walks, such as the one I attended on Oct. 7.

“I feel that it’s a great place for me to give people a safe introduction to mushrooms,” Akabane said.

Filled with mushroom lovers (called mycophiles) and those newly mushroom-curious (like myself), the foraging class set out at 10 a.m. eager to find some wild mushrooms to draw, photograph, and cook.

While he still considers himself an “amateur,” Akabane’s skilled eye spots camouflaged mushrooms in the brush and dirt seemingly with ease. Within the first few minutes of the two-hour class, he had found a large hen-of-the-woods mushroom, also called maitake, nestled between the roots of a tree.

Maitake, he explained, is a common mushroom to find this time of the year in New England, and one he often sells at The Mushroom Shop.

“I like food. I like people and cultures related to foods and the ways that people gather [around it],” Akabane said. “[I was] interested in cooking and learning about mushrooms that would end up in fancy meals. ... How do you get a thing like that?”



Tyler Akabane holds out porcini mushrooms he foraged in Lynn. JESSICA RINALDI/GLOBE STAFF

It seemed, Akabane found, that the only way to find those wild mushrooms for that risotto was to hunt for them himself. He now provides mushrooms for top restaurants such as [O-Ya](#), [Thistle & Leek](#), and [Giulia](#), as well as selling to home cooks.

On Oct. 21 and 22, Akabane is teaming up with chef Erin Miller's [Urban Hearth](#) in Somerville for a special Wild Mushroom Dinner experience. The four-course meal will feature local mushrooms from Akabane's shop (as well as some foraged by Miller herself). Throughout the meal, Akabane will share his mushroom knowledge and tips for diners to learn more about the food they're eating.

His dinner at Urban Hearth is not the only mushroom meal he's taken part in. This year, Akabane will work with [Field & Vine](#), [Forage](#), and the [Boston Mycological Club](#), which is a group of fungi enthusiasts who study and enjoy mushrooms together. (Akabane is an active member.) He is also hosting one of his own through The Mushroom Shop and [Open Hearth Gatherings](#) for Day of the Dead.

After Akabane taught a member of our group how to properly remove the hen-of-the-woods from the dirt (firmly lifting from the bottom), we examined its size, coloring, and pores before splitting it between the group to take home and cook.

As we trekked along, we found a number of other small mushrooms that Akabane identified through a series of observations and tests. He identified an edible russula mushroom by its red cap and lack of “warts” on top. One identifying factor of the tinder polypore is its woody texture and hyperpigmentation when touched. In order to confirm that the tiny black mushrooms we found were garlic marasmius, we smelled to see if a pungent garlic odor was present, which it was (surprisingly strong for a mushroom a quarter the size of my pinky).



Tyler Akabane inspects the base of a fallen oak tree as he forages for mushrooms in Lynn. JESSICA RINALDI/GLOBE STAFF

Akabane learned much of what he knows about how to identify mushrooms through Ben Maleson — known as “The Mushroom Man.”

Before he was a mushroom hunter, Akabane was a music teacher at Boston Higashi School, a school for children and teens with autism. A Berklee College of Music graduate, he had recently begun foraging as a new creative outlet. He joked that mushroom hunting was an addition to his “repertoire of obsessions” that has stuck around.

One day, Akabane remembers, Maleson drove by him finishing a day of foraging. The two struck up a conversation, which led to years of mentorship and partnership. At age 28, Akabane left his job at the school to work with mushrooms full time alongside Maleson.

“It was a relatively safe transition — [this] sounds crazy to most people — but from a stable job to a job that sounds pretty unstable: being a mushroom man,” Akabane said, laughing.

One tip Akabane passed on to us from Maleson was not only to look down at the ground for mushrooms, but to look up in the trees. One can identify if a tree has fungus growing by its roots or its trunk if there are dead branches or signs of decay up in the leaves. We used this technique to find turkey tail mushrooms. Another trick was to identify species of trees mushrooms target to grow around, such as birch for matsutake and oak for chicken-of-the-woods.

“Mushroom hunting is also tree hunting,” he told the group.



Tyler Akabane forages for mushrooms. JESSICA RINALDI/GLOBE STAFF

An hour into the walk, we came across our first inedible mushroom, the deceptive milky mushroom. White in color with a prominent rolled cap, the mushroom is not deadly, but not advisable to eat as it can cause stomach problems, Akabane told us. Since it has look-alikes that are edible, it is important to test whether the mushroom was safe for consumption. The way to test, Akabane told us, was through tasting it.

While he does not recommend amateur foragers taste mushrooms they are unfamiliar with, it can be a useful tool for identification. Reluctantly, many of us on the walk took a small bite. The key was to mash the mushroom between your teeth and your bottom lip, Akabane told us. Taste the mushroom, but never swallow it, always spit it out. A strong peppery, almost chemical flavor flooded my mouth as I tasted the mushroom; I promptly spit it out, alongside the other brave souls. Definitely inedible.

But, even with all his experience, Akabane never picks a mushroom he is not 100 percent able to identify, and urges other young foragers to follow suit. A common deadly

mushroom in New England, the Amanita, also known as the “angel of death” mushroom, can be unassuming and look similar to other non-poisonous species. “Don’t take a chance,” was a motto he repeated throughout the walk, “and watch out for little brown mushrooms.”

As the session came to a close, the group divided up the mushrooms in Akabane’s wicker basket, and he gave each attendee a small paper bag of wild mushrooms from his shop to take home. Some leftover mushrooms remained in his basket, which he said he would cook himself, instead of taking back to his shop to sell.



The basket of mushrooms the group foraged. JESSICA RINALDI/GLOBE STAFF

“My relationship with foraging [now] is either through classes or personal,” he said, mentioning that while he does forage for his shop, he imports a lot from other trusted foragers across the United States.

“It can be one of those things where, [if] you do the thing you love for a job, it stops being enjoyable,” he continued. “I try to keep it enjoyable.”

After more than a decade in the mushroom business, Akabane mainly forages for fun. He recalls the highlight of his time foraging not as opening the shop, nor selling to haute restaurants, but as his yearly springtime trip to Western Mass. with his close friends to hunt morels.

“The joy that is like to be outside, finding yourself fascinated with nature and take[ing] your time making a meal and enjoying it together is one of my favorite things about what I do,” he said. “That is one of the reasons why I like mushroom hunting so much: I found it a way to get together with people, and share and learn and commune over things.”

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