

# Foraging walk near Chicago beach teaches residents about edible plants they didn't know grew in the heart of the city

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Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

Professional forager Dave Odd confidently declared he could start a Sunday tour at Wilson Skate Park by identifying five edible plants right

underneath his feet. Taking a step forward, he pointed to a dandelion and called it "the most obvious" edible plant.

Growing in every temperate zone, some sort of dandelion will always be nearby, Odd said, and every part of the plant is edible.

One of Odd's favorite parts are the flowers, which he said can be fried or made into vegan honey. But the dandelion's real prize, according to Odd, is the root. He said the root can be cooked and eaten "just like potatoes."

On his latest Eat the Parks event, Odd led a group of about 20 foragers around Montrose Beach and Montrose Point, identifying the names and uses of dozens of trees, flowers, grasses and mushrooms. The participants did not forage any of the identified plants. Instead, Odd taught participants what characteristics to look for when foraging for [edible plants](#) in the future.

Odd said he's held the event in various Chicago neighborhoods, Illinois state parks and towns across the greater Midwest during the April-to-October growing season, but Sunday was the first time he has led a group around Montrose Beach and Montrose Point.

He said he didn't know what the group might see in the area before giving the tour.

"That's the fun of it," Odd said. "I choose new spots all the time."

Odd said there are entire families of plants and mushrooms that have no toxic members. Throughout the event, Odd taught the participants to narrow down plants to specific families that are always edible.

Shane Alden, whom Odd described as his protege, occasionally stepped in to point out a plant. Odd said he met Alden last year on one of his

tours, and he's shadowing on tours so he can lead his own foraging groups in the future.

As the tour made its way through the Montrose Point Bird Sanctuary, Alden pointed out Queen Anne's lace, also known as a wild carrot plant. Some new foragers may confuse the wild carrot with poison hemlock, he said, as they have similar flowers, but the key to identifying Queen Anne's lace is the fuzzy stems.

"Queen Anne has hairy legs," he joked with the group.

Christy Jackson, a first-time Eat the Parks participant, said she found Odd's Facebook page after looking for groups related to mushroom foraging. She said she was surprised to see so many edible plants growing in such an urban area during the tour.

"I didn't expect there to be so much around us that you can eat," Jackson said. "That you can, as he mentioned a few times, just pick and pry up and throw into your pancakes for some extra nutrition."

And for those mushroom-loving foragers like Jackson, a highlight of the tour was when Odd spotted a yellow chicken of the woods growing on a hawthorn tree while the group was still near the skate park.

Odd said the mushrooms are named for their taste—"they legit taste like chicken"—and added that someone could revolutionize meat substitutes if he or she could reliably cultivate the fungi. To the awe of the participants, Odd said he'd never seen a chicken of the woods in Chicago before Sunday.

"I'm blown away that this is here," Odd said.

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