



## Lobsters growing in the forests at Royal Roads!

*By Anne Munier*

How exciting is one mushroom that's been parasitized by another mushroom, which makes it turn orange and lumpy and smell mildly of seafood?! Pretty special, I'd say. Welcome to the wonderful world of lobster mushrooms (*Hypomyces*

*lactifluorum*).

Lobster mushrooms grow by completely covering their host fungus, which include a variety of species, most commonly the short-stemmed *Russula* (a white, gilled mushroom that has little to offer in terms of flavour until the *Hypomyces* has its way with it). While some have wondered whether the lobster can be poisonous if it has a poisonous host (which it usually does not), they have been eaten for centuries and commercialized more recently, without known ill effects.

Lobster mushrooms grow on the ground in coniferous forests (and are particularly abundant at Royal Roads these days!); hemlock is a tree with which it is often associated. Even for a fungus this species is rather odd-looking. It is medium-sized, bright orange like a cooked lobster (making it nice and visible when you're wandering through the woods), and takes on a distorted version of the shape of its host. It tends to develop into an inverted pyramid with a concave cap and indistinct gills on the underside, though it can continue growing into a shape that is knobby, deformed, bizarre, yet quite unique. The lobster's texture has been described as "smoothly pimpled", and it has inner flesh which is white and firm until it starts to decay, which seems to happen relatively quickly with this species once water and dirt get trapped in the cracks of the flesh. Not to worry though, if it has lost its culinary appeal, it can always be used as a dye!

Lobsters will keep for about a week in the refrigerator. They should be washed (a toothbrush works well to get the dirt off), be trimmed of any brown bits, and are nice sauteed or cooked into a frittata:

### Lobster Mushroom Frittata

1 oz. dried Lobster mushrooms or a handful of fresh ones

3 Tbs. butter

1/2 cup milk

1/2 cup chopped onion

1/4 cup chopped parsley

1/2 tsp. salt

1/4 tsp. black pepper

6 eggs

4 oz. feta cheese, crumbled

In bowl, pour heated milk over coarsely chopped Lobster mushrooms and let sit for one hour. In saucepan, lightly sauté onion in 2 Tbs. butter. Beat eggs into milk and mushrooms. Add onions and the remaining ingredients. Heat the remaining butter in a large, ovenproof skillet over medium high heat. When quite hot add the egg mixture and cook until bottom is set. Place under preheated broiler to finish cooking and brown the top.

**Caution:** While lobster mushrooms have been enjoyed for hundreds of years, it is always best to try just a small amount of any new mushroom at first. This species is quite distinct-looking, making it a good one for people less familiar with edible mushrooms to try harvesting, never eat or serve a wild mushroom if you aren't sure of its edibility!

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