

Indigo milk caps, or *Lactarius indigo*, get their unusual blue color from a compound in the milky substance they exude, which sometimes turns dark green after being exposed to the air.

OUT OF THE BLUE

ASHEVILLE

On a wooded trail just east of downtown Asheville, foraging educator and local mushroom expert Alan Muskat sees beyond summer's overgrown greenery to spot a surprisingly edible mushroom with a Smurf blue underside: the indigo milk cap. Blue may be a prominent color on Earth, but among living things, it's rare. So while it seems that this bright specimen should easily stand out, finding it takes a trained eye. "Foraging takes practice and guidance," Muskat says. "It takes a community." Not unlike the symbiotic networks that fungal mycelia form throughout forests, those in the foraging community share sightings, which is how Muskat came to search this particular area.

In short order, he spots a palm-size indigo milk cap, partially concealed under a composting pile of last winter's leaves. Milk caps seep a sticky, milky — and, in this case, blue — fluid when cut or damaged, Muskat says. They can be found in coniferous and deciduous forests throughout eastern North America, as well as East Asia and Central America. In North Carolina, indigo milk caps are common across the state, usually from July to September. And while enchanting in their oddness, they are indeed edible and quite tasty when breaded and fried, delivering a mild flavor and a touch of nuttiness. *Os*

— Melissa Reardon

Muskat does not recommend foraging for mushrooms without an experienced guide. To schedule a tour with his business, No Taste Like Home, visit notastelikehome.org.