

Haul of the Wild

Grocery shopping meets hiking at a California resort

As bright poppies and bold lupine blossoms signal the arrival of spring, a new nature trek at California's Carmel Valley Ranch introduces a more under-the-radar sign of the season: edible greens growing along the resort's well-traveled trails and remote, rugged hills. Local naturalists lead the 90-minute tasting tour and hands-on harvest experience, which the resort calls Foraging: The Wild Buffet.

"We visit our favorite secret foraging spots on this 500-acre property," says Andrea Weiss, the resort's naturalist. "We also explore what you might find in your own backyard. You can apply what you learn here when you go home."

While hiking, guides explain how to identify edible plants and incorporate them into meals. On some routes, naturalists peel spiny thistle stems and share the crunchy interior stalks; elsewhere, guests might nibble on tender miner's lettuce, fresh from the field. Guides also toss foraged leaves and herbs—such as aromatic yerba buena, mugwort, and wild mint—into a Thermos of hot water, creating a

flavorful tea that groups share at the tour's end.

The excursion is an extension of the ranch's farm-to-table practices. Foraged mushrooms and lettuce often turn up in dishes at the Valley Kitchen restaurant, which uses ingredients from on-site gardens, lavender fields, and beehives.

"When guests understand the connection between plants and what's on their plate," says Weiss, "they walk away with a better understanding of why environmental stewardship matters."

—RENEE BRINCKS