COMPLETE GUIDE TO MOREL MUSHROOM HUNTING IN THE CADILLAC AREA

Morels may be the best known wild mushrooms in the Midwest and are hunted by hundreds of thousands of people. They are delicious, easy to correctly identify and generally are safe to eat.

The fruiting period of morel mushrooms is from late April until mid-June, however the best hunting is in May. A warm, moist spring is best for morels.

Mushroom hunting can be safe and fun. However, you must be able to identify the mushrooms you collect as true morels. This brochure will not provide you with enough information to identify and collect wild mushrooms, only provide general guidelines. It is recommended that you pick with someone who is an experienced hunter and to use an illustrated mushroom guidebook.

GUIDELINES FOR SAFE EATING

Remember, mushrooms from the wild can be dangerous if proper identification isn’t made. Use caution when hunting mushrooms in the wild. Also follow these simple tips to ensure safety:

- Eat only cooked, fresh young mushrooms with no sign of damage.
- Try morels in small quantities to make sure you have no adverse reactions. Each person must try them for themselves, as even “safe” mushrooms may produce an allergic reaction to some people. Save a few fresh specimens for identification in case some one should become ill.
- Do not drink alcohol when eating mushrooms. Alcohol may promote the entry of potential toxins into the body.
- If you become ill after consuming mushrooms, seek medical attention promptly. Symptoms of mushroom poisoning may include abdominal cramping, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, loss of coordination and hallucinations.

REMEMBER WHEN IN DOUBT, THROW IT OUT!

Use caution, and if at anytime you believe the texture, smell, or look of your mushroom does not appear correct, discard right away.

HAPPY HUNTING
WHAT IS A MOREL?

What is a Morel Mushroom?

Below is a list of some differences between true and false morels. Look at the accompanying pictures to the right along with expanded descriptions included under “Identify a True/False Morel.”

The two most important features to examine when trying to identify a morel mushroom are the cap shape and whether the interior is hollow.

True morels share these characteristics (SAFE):

- Hollow from bottom of stem to top of cap if cut lengthwise.
- Bottom of cap is attached to the stem.
- Cap is full of ridges and pits (prune like, only deeper pits).
- On most morels, the cap is longer than the stem.
- Stem has little bumps both inside and out.
- Stalk is usually a light color (sand, yellow or grayish).

False Morel Look-alike (DO NOT EAT):

- Common cap is more wavy and lobed. It appears to be bulging outwards.
- Cap often has an irregular shape and appears "squashed", almost as though it has been stepped on.
- Cap hangs freely off the stem. If you slice it lengthwise you’ll see the cap is attached to the very top of the stem.
- The inside is not hollow. It will be filled with some cottony fibers or chunks of tissue.

Identify a True Morel

Morchella elata – This is commonly known as the “black” morel. This color may vary from gray or grayish-tan when young, darkening to black or almost black when older. Black morels usually appear during the last two weeks of April. The best black morel hunting usually falls within the first two weeks of May.

Morchella esculenta – This is commonly known as the “white” or “yellow” morel. The color may vary from creamy to yellow-tan. The second and third weekend of May is usually a good weekend to find this morel.

Identify a False Morel

Verpa bohemica – The “false” morel may look similar, but does not have all of the characteristics of a true morel. The most telling sign of a false morel is the way the cap is attached to the stalk. The cap of a false morel is attached only at the tip of the stalk and hangs like a skirt around it. The false morel is not recommended for consumption.

Gyromitra esculenta – The “beefsteak” mushroom is irregularly lobed and wavy with a reddish brown cap and a light colored stem. As this mushroom matures, it will darken to nearly black. The beefsteak morel is not recommended for consumption.
WHERE TO HUNT?

GUIDELINES FOR COLLECTING

Here are some helpful tips when collecting. These are great for the first-time hunters along with a few items that even the seasoned pros may have not known.

- **Know exactly what you are collecting.** If you are a beginner, pick with someone who knows mushrooms very well. Use an illustrated mushroom guidebook.
- **Use mesh bags*, paper bags or a woven basket for collecting.** Do not use plastic bags as mushrooms will begin to spoil before you get them home. Breathable bags also allow spores to release during hunting which will aid in the repopulating of mushrooms in the area.
- **Select only fresh, young mushrooms that are undamaged.** After a mushroom matures, it begins to deteriorate. One spoiling specimen can contaminate the entire batch.
- **Pinch the mushroom or use a small knife to cut the mushrooms just above the ground.**
- **Keep mushrooms cool, shaded and well aired until you get them home.**

WHERE CAN MORELS BE FOUND?

The Manistee National Forest and state land around Cadillac is a popular hunting ground; morels can be found throughout. There is no definite spot on where to find morels, however, here are some suggested conditions to look for that may yield the elusive morel:

- **Black morels can usually be found growing around ash, fruit and aspen trees (also known as popple or poplar) and have also been found growing in lawns and fields.**
- **Hunt for elm, fruit and maple trees when looking for the white/yellow morels.**
- **Some mushrooms grow on trees. Morels do not.** You will always find them on the ground. They appear solitary, scattered, or in groups and clusters. They do not grow on wood.

**Black Morels (first to typically appear):**
Black morels typically appear first, so we’ll start with them. They generally grow near ash, sycamore, aspen, and coniferous trees. Black morels can be found in burned areas as well, especially 1 to 2 years after the occurrence of a forest fire. Additionally, wetland areas can be conducive to black morel mushroom fruitings, especially in lowlands containing sycamore and cottonwood trees.

**Yellow/White Morels:**
Yellow/White Morels grow near a variety of hardwood trees, including tulip poplar, ash, and dead or dying elm trees. Older apple orchards are also good places to look.
ENJOYING YOUR MOREL HARVEST

PREPARATION
Here are some helpful hints for Morel preparation.

- Rinse mushrooms and slice lengthwise; clean out any dirt or insects. Discard any badly damaged specimens. Soak in salt water in refrigerator to remove additional dirt and insects.
- Morels should be cooked as soon as possible since they begin to deteriorate soon after picking. They can be cooked and frozen, canned or dried (sun dry, air dry, in oven or hang dry with needle and thread).

COOKING TIPS
Here are some helpful hints for Morel preparation.

- Sautéing is an easy and delicious way to prepare morels. Melt butter in a frying pan, add a single layer of morel halves and sauté for about five minutes each side. Watch that they do not stick!
- Morels can be used in any recipe calling for mushrooms but be aware that they have a delicate flavor that can be overwhelmed by strong seasonings.

COOK RIGHT AWAY FOR BEST RESULTS AFTER PICKING.

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