

Morel Mushroom Hunting Tips



Timing and Weather Conditions:

End of April to the end of May are the best times, weather dependent. Listen to your friends and check our website at visitbenzie.com daily for news. Ideal temperatures are between 60 – 70 degrees during the day and temperatures in the 50's at night.

Conditions for a Good Mushroom season:

They say that a heavy snow fall will produce a great season. Perhaps this is because of all the moisture that the snow brings that is in the ground making the conditions better. Mushrooms don't particularly like dry conditions and thrive on moisture. And if we can slide into the spring without a lot of up and down changing temperatures and a gradual warm up this is the perfect weather for the best mushroom results.

How to pick them:

Clip or break them off, but don't pull the morels from the ground as you want to maintain the root system so they will continue to come up year after year as long as the soil provides the proper nutrients.

Best places to find them:

In the woods (and we have plenty of those in Benzie County!) Mushrooms tend to want to grow around trees like in old Apple orchards and dead Elm trees and logs. Living White Ash and Maple are also common areas. They like places where wood has burned, under leaves, moist areas etc. Old stumps and fallen trees are popular harvesting areas. Morels like rich black or sandy soil and not clay. You may find them next to river or streams. But some have found them in tall grasses and areas with just black dirt.

The hardest thing is to adjust your eyes to see a morel as they are the same color as the ground and the leaves and twigs/branches that surround them. I actually know someone who takes a morel with them on their hunt just so he can adjust his eyes to be looking for the shape and color of the mushroom. It's usually hardest to find your first one and after that there are others that congregate in the same area in flushes because often their roots systems are spread out.

Expert mushroom hunters agree that if you know your trees you'll be a lot more successful in hunting them so learn your trees.

Morel Colors:

Light tans, grays and blacks. The black morels usually emerge first in the season.

Caution for first time morel hunters:

"The Morel is one of the easiest mushrooms to identify in the woods but care and caution should always be taken when out in the woods hunting any type of wild mushroom. You should always go with an experienced hunter first to help you identify which mushrooms are safe. There are many dangerous plants and fungi that will kill you. There are many safe mushrooms that have false look-a-likes out there that can be deadly and there have been people that have mistakenly picked and eaten the wrong ones. There is no known cure for mushroom poisoning. So be absolutely sure before picking and once again, if you are new to mushroom hunting go with an experienced hunter first. Rule: When in doubt, throw it out." (Per northcountrymorels.com) Another rule is that a true morel will always be hollow on the inside with the cap portion securely attached to the stem. There are poisonous mushrooms that look like morels that have a white cotton fiber in their stem and a cap that is barely attached and drapes the stem like a skirt.

What can you eat with morels:

Morels are wonderful cooked in butter and salt and pepper – simple. Because of their amazing flavor they are great like this and go well with steak or chicken or as a topping for pasta if you're a vegetarian. I also recommend them in an omelet. They can be used in place of more common mushrooms in any recipe, but if there are a lot of ingredients and seasonings, it will sometimes mask the great flavor of the morel which is for most "the main event".

Best Attire:

Wear long pants and long sleeves as you'll be walking through prickly bushes, trees and maybe even poison ivy.

What to bring with you on a hunt:

A compass – When you're looking at the ground and walking you can go a mile in a random pattern and you need to know how to get back to your car

A GPS – Even better is a GPS (Global Positioning System) with your compass and you can mark the area where you find the mushrooms so you can return again to this spot in the future

A mesh bag – These are ideal for allowing the morels once you find them for dropping spores as you continue to walk further developing the area for more mushrooms in future seasons. They also allow air to circulate around them unlike a plastic bag which holds heat and moisture and activates the rotting process.

Walking Stick – If you're walking a long time you can also use the stick to move twigs and leaves rather than bending over all of the time.

Hiking Boots – A light, waterproof hiking boot is great as you'll encounter many muddy areas along the way. It also provides good ankle support as you're stepping over uneven terrain and branches on the ground.

Two – Way Radios – So you can separate with your partner or group and still find them. They can also alert you to a good find.

Water & Snacks – A 2 quart canteen that you can hang around your neck and. Snacks, so you don't have to leave the woods due to hunger.

Insect Repellent – Deep Woods Off with Deet is a great option for both mosquitoes and ticks.