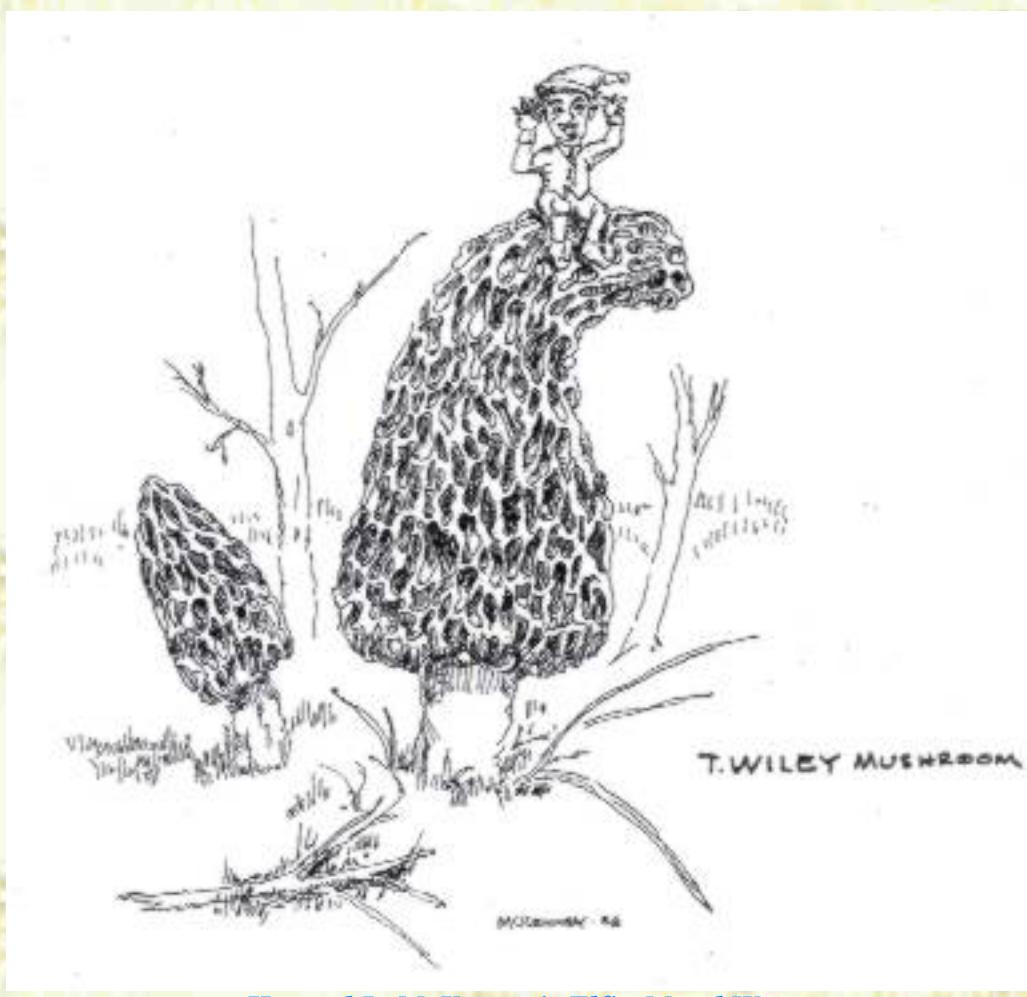


Indy's Quick Morel Hunting Guide

by Don Jordan



Indy's What, When, Where, Why, and How On Morels

Finally, it's here. Spring is springing and the first scattered reports of morel finds have begun to dribble in from around the Midwest, and this annual renewal is the signal for most outdoors mavens to head for the woods.

Here is a brief morel hunting guide applicable to most places where this most delicious fungus is found. That includes nearly every state. Timing of appearance is delayed as you move north.



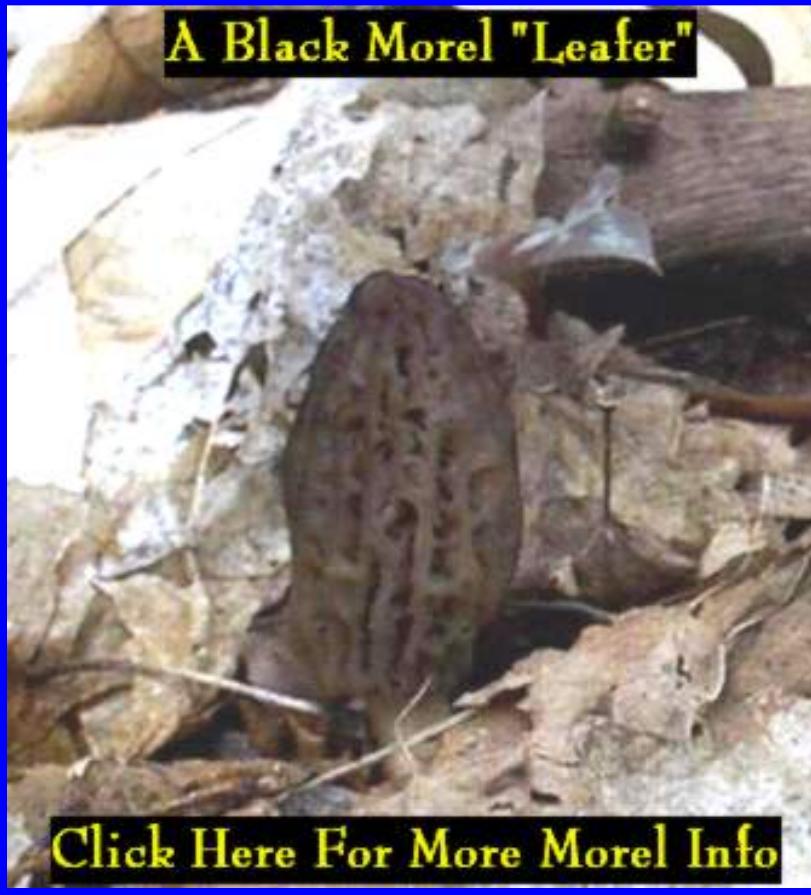
WHERE TO FIND THEM: Black morels grow in the same kinds of places their later arriving kin, the white/gray and yellow morels grow, they just pop up first. The very best places to look for all these species are areas where there are live or dead elm trees. Even areas that once held elm trees or where there are a few rotting stumps are good spots to look. This is true even in suburban yards. Many city dwellers walk into their yards on an April morning and find morels standing like small spikes in their lawns.

Of course, you aren't going to find any morels in your yard if your yard has been regularly sprayed with herbicide. And, you have a much better chance of finding a morel if a few old trees remain standing on your lot.

Out in the woods your chances are better. The very best chances in my experience are in spots where a large tree or several large trees have been blown down or toppled from old age. These events open the forest floor to sunlight and, in the case of blown down trees, the earth is often disturbed. This frequently stimulates underground mycelia, the main vegetative part of all

fungi, to send up fruiting bodies—in this case the morel or "sponge" mushroom.

A Black Morel "Leafer"



[Click Here For More Morel Info](#)

Another excellent place to look is where fire has opened the forest floor. For years I found large black morels around a spot behind the house where I burned a slash pile on the edge of the woods. Another good place is around your outdoor barbecue pit, if you have burned sticks and limbs there.

WHEN TO LOOK: Although morels can pop up just about any time when conditions are right for them, the very best times are on warm mornings following a warm nighttime shower. Morels have to have moisture to thrive,

and the first warm nights are always good stimulators.

All varieties will appear sometime during April in Indiana, later in Michigan and Wisconsin, earlier in Kentucky and Tennessee, excepting the mountains. The sequence is black morel, white/gray morel and yellow morel. The long-stemmed woods mushrooms with the tiny black sponge-like cap usually appear later in the month. Although not as prized as their larger-capped relatives, these 'shrooms are very tasty too.

To realize good success as a mushroom hunter, you have to spend a lot of time looking. When conditions are right—warm, moist mornings—the wise morel hunter scouts likely areas every day. You will often see a car or pickup parked along a country road in the mornings this month, as morel hunters stop on the way to work to make a quick check.

Oldtimers always used to tell me that the very best time to hunt morels coincides with that time when dogwood tree leaves are "the size of a mouse's

ear." That's a pretty small leaf. That time hasn't arrived yet, but it won't be long. Check those dogwood trees.

IDENTIFICATION: If you have never seen a morel before, it is probably best to get someone who has to identify your first finds. Although morels are very distinctive are hard to mistake for something else, there is one fungus called the false morel that is toxic. Some people get sick after eating this variety. False morels look most like the early black morel. So far as I know there is no false morel that has the coloration of the white/gray and yellow varieties.

There are some fungus identification books around, and books with photos of morels can give you a very good idea of what to you're hunting. However, there is no substitute for experience. The best bet is to get someone who knows morels to take you hunting. Once you have seen a few in their natural habitat, you will never forget their appearance.



Large Yellow Morel

PREPARATION: Most morel fans slice them lengthwise into two pieces. Soaking overnight in saltwater will get rid of any small mites that may or may not be present. If the morels you find are dried out from standing too long in the woods, soaking will revive them.

Once soaked, coat lightly with flour and pan fry until they are golden brown. This is a real taste treat. If you consume them along with a platter of crappie or bluegill fillets and a good helping of wilted lettuce, you will realize the very best

Hoosier meal there is.

DJ'S MOREL TIP: Remember, morels are rather fragile things, so if you stumble into a large patch, take care in picking and bagging them. The weight of a mess of morels will crush the ones at the bottom of the bag and you will have a bunch of morel bits and pieces when you get home. Plastic bags are great, but don't go dropping bags around the woods. There are enough plastic bags lining country roads without adding to the litter.

CONSERVATION: Altough the part of the fungus you see above ground is only a tiny portion of a sometimes huge underground organism, the fruiting body, the morel, is the reproductive organ. If you pick every last morel you find in a patch, you are effectively thwarting reproduction. Always leave a few.

More Morel Madness

One of my favorite oldtimers sent a note last week too. Howard L. McKenney is an 82-year-old Bloomington resident who has been in a wheel chair for 19 years. He produces excellent morel drawings that feature an elflike fellow name T. Wiley Mushroom. One of his recent drawings tops this page.

McKenney is a warehouse of morel lore, and he reminded me that morels can be frozen for later enjoyment.

"If you get enough, put them on a cookie sheet and freeze. Then you can have them for Thanksgiving breakfast. They are great. Remember, you have to cook them first. If you don't, they turn to mush when you thaw them," wrote McKenney. Be sure to store them in an air tight freezing bag to keep them from suffering freezer burn and drying.

And, who would have guessed, morels are apparently good for other things besides eating. According to Howard, he has a lady friend who writes cook books. When she visited last year, he pulled out the frozen morels.

"She hadn't had morels for years and really loved them!" McKenney reported.

Along these lines, Bloomington cook extraordinaire Rita Hefron, was afraid her

husband, Mike, would be unable to eat morels prepared the favored way—rolled in flour and fried in butter. But according to correspondent Jennifer Hubbard, you can use morels in any recipe that calls for mushrooms. They are so much more tasty than any other ‘shroom that your friends will praise your recipe.

I have never had enough spare morels to experiment, but I'll bet a morel-laden pizza would be a treat to remember.

updated 4/14/03...indy

Some Good Morel Links:

[**The Great Morel Site:**](#) *Photo of gray morel*

[**The Illinois State Mushroom Hunting Championship and Spongy Fungi Festival**](#)

[**Mansfield Mushroom Festival**](#)

[**National Morel Hunters Association**](#)

[**Rocky's Roost: Morels in Michigan**](#)

[**Mushroom Madness: Morels Worldwide**](#)



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