



MOREL MUSHROOMS

A Guide for Selection and Use

by Julie Cascio, Extension Faculty, Health Home and Family Development, and Marci Johnson, Extension Program Assistant

FNH-00020

Discovering the elusive morel hidden amidst decomposing leaves on the forest floor, in open fields or on hillsides is like finding buried treasure. After positively identifying it as an edible morel, cook and eat your treasure as soon after harvest as possible for best flavor.

Nutrition and Health

Edible morels contain fiber, some protein and unsaturated fat, but the complete nutrient information is unknown. Nutritional value, flavor and aroma of morels are affected by where they grow.

Although morel mushrooms are edible, they have been known to cause allergic reactions and gastrointestinal upset. Combining morels with alcohol can compound this. When small amounts are eaten at one time, they are not likely to be harmful for most people. Morels should be fully cooked before being eaten.

Selection

Proper identification of an edible mushroom is the responsibility of the harvester. Many forest

mushroom varieties are poisonous. Guidebooks are available to assist with identification. When in doubt, leave it in the forest. Mushrooms should smell fresh and earthy. Those with soft spots or bruising should not be picked.

Storage

Wipe mushrooms gently with a damp cloth or soft brush to remove dirt, debris and insects.

Refrigerate de-bugged mushrooms between 34 – 35°F. Wrap them in a paper bag or waxed paper. Non-porous plastic bags are not the best choice as plastic accelerates mushroom deterioration.

Do not wash morels before storage. Mushrooms absorb water and the additional water will hasten deterioration.

Mushrooms may absorb odors if stored near foods like onions.

Refrigerated, fresh mushrooms will keep for 2 to 3 days. For longer storage, mushrooms should be frozen or dried.

Morels and Summer Vegetables

1½ ounces	DRIED morels, reconstituted (see directions inside)
1	medium sweet bell pepper
2	small zucchini
2 tablespoons	olive oil
1 tablespoon	minced onion
1	small clove garlic, minced
1 tablespoon	balsamic vinegar, optional
¼ teaspoon	sugar, optional
	salt and pepper to taste

Slice the reconstituted morels in half lengthwise.

Wash bell pepper. Remove seeds. Slice bell pepper into thin strips.

Cut zucchini into thin slices. Sauté onion in olive oil in a 10-inch skillet over medium heat until golden. Add the morels and cook 2 minutes. Season with salt and pepper. Add the peppers, zucchini and garlic and cook 5 minutes. If using vinegar and sugar, combine in a small bowl to dissolve. Add this to the pan and cook 2 more minutes.

Preparing Morels for Use

When ready to use, mushrooms may be gently rinsed in cool water and drained. Shake gently to remove excess water. Mushrooms readily absorb water so do not soak them.

There is no need to peel mushrooms. Trim and discard any portions of the mushrooms that are discolored or infested with insects or maggots.

Cooking Morels

Cook morel mushrooms in a stainless steel or non-stick pan. Aluminum or iron pans may give the mushrooms an unpleasant metallic taste.

Freezing Morels

Preparation

Choose mushrooms free from spots and decay. Sort them according to size. Rinse in cold water. Shake gently to remove excess water. Trim ends of stems. If morels are larger than 1 inch across, slice them or cut them into quarters.

Prepare mushrooms for freezing by steaming, blanching or sautéing to inactivate enzymes that can cause color and texture deterioration. Steamed mushrooms will keep longer than those heated in fat. Freezing raw mushrooms is

not recommended as they do not keep well and may develop a bitter taste. Dusting raw morels with flour before freezing results in a gummy texture and is not recommended.

To Steam

Use a pot with a tight lid and a basket that holds the food three inches above the bottom of the pot. Put 1 – 2 inches of water into pot and add one teaspoon lemon juice per pint of water; bring to a boil. Add morels to basket in a single layer and place in pot. Cover. Steam 5 minutes. Remove morels and cool promptly. Package in freezer containers, leaving 1/2-inch headspace. Seal, label and freeze.

To Blanch

Bring water to a boil. Add 1 teaspoon lemon juice per pint of water. Add morels to the boiling water and bring water back to boil. Boil 3 minutes. Remove morels from water and drain. Cool promptly then package in freezer containers, leaving 1/2-inch headspace. Seal, label and freeze.

To Sauté

Follow the recipe on the back page for sautéed mushrooms. Cool, then package in freezer containers, leaving 1/2-inch headspace. Seal, label and freeze.

Salmon Fillet with Morels

1 tablespoon	butter
4 tablespoons	minced onion
1/2 pound	morels, trimmed, cleaned and sliced
3/4 cup	sodium-free chicken broth
20-ounce	salmon fillet
3 tablespoons	heavy cream
1/2 teaspoon	dried tarragon (or 2 teaspoons fresh)
	Salt and pepper to taste

Melt butter in heavy large skillet over medium heat. Add minced onion and sauté 2 minutes. Add morels; sauté until beginning to brown, about 5 minutes. Add salmon fillet, cook two minutes. Add chicken broth. Cover; cook about 15 minutes, or until salmon flakes easily with a fork.

Remove salmon to platter and keep warm.

Boil broth a few minutes to reduce it. Add cream to mushroom mixture; boil until thickened, about 1 minute. Mix in chopped tarragon. Season with salt and pepper.

Spoon sauce over salmon and serve. Serves 6.

Drying Morels

Preparation

Mushrooms may be dried whole or in cut slices without blanching first. Drying time can be hastened by cutting morels into small uniform pieces. Dry only fresh mushrooms in good condition. Mushrooms are a low-acid food and must be dried until they are brittle (less than 10 percent moisture remains) to insure no microorganisms can grow.

Methods

Mushrooms may be dried by using a dehydrator, convection or conventional ovens, a solar dryer or indoors at room temperature. Microwave ovens are not recommended for drying mushrooms as there is not enough air flow.

Choose a well-ventilated area to dry morels. Be aware that some people may have allergic reactions from drying mushrooms in their home. If you have allergies or have never dried mushrooms before do not try to dry mushrooms inside your home.

If using a convection or conventional oven, temperature readings must go as low as 140°F. If your oven does not go this low, your food will cook instead of dry. An oven thermometer can be used to check the temperature.

Drying times will vary according to conditions. Usually it takes 8–10 hours in a dehydrator and longer with other methods. Check the manufacturer's directions for recommended temperature settings and approximate drying times if you are using a commercially purchased dehydrator.

Use only stainless steel or plastic screens for drying. Other metals are not acceptable surfaces for drying. Screens and racks must be carefully cleaned as mushrooms leave a film that may cause mold to develop.

Storage of Dried Mushrooms

Store in airtight, food-grade containers. Dried mushrooms will keep up to 3 months at room temperatures and longer in the freezer. Cook morel mushrooms thoroughly before eating.

Methods for Reconstituting Dried Morels

- Pour boiling water over dried mushrooms and simmer 20–30 minutes or until they have returned to their original shape. Use a ratio of 1 part mushroom to 3 parts water. Use as specified.
- Add dried mushrooms to a product with lots of liquid, such as soup. Cook for at least 20 minutes. This will rehydrate the mushrooms and cook them in a single step.

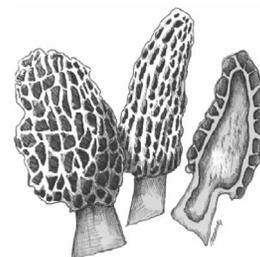


Illustration by Margaret Herring

1½ cups	dried morel mushrooms, (see directions to reconstitute above)
1 pound	beef (sirloin or your favorite cut)
1	finely chopped medium onion
½ teaspoon	dried basil
¾ teaspoon	nutmeg
½ cup	beef stock
2 cups	sour cream (regular or light)
	salt to taste
8 cups	cooked pasta

Morel Mushroom Stroganoff

Reconstitute morels. Cut beef in ¼-inch-thick strips that are about 3 inches long; brown over high heat. Reduce heat to medium. Add onions and sauté until soft.

Drain morels thoroughly; squeeze out excess moisture. Add morels, basil and nutmeg to beef. Sauté approximately 5 minutes. Add beef stock and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to low. Add sour cream and salt. Stir until smooth.

Simmer over low heat from 15 to 20 minutes. Serve hot over your favorite pasta. Makes enough sauce for 5 to 6 people.

Sautéed Morels

½ pound morel mushrooms, cleaned,
patted dry
2 tablespoons butter

Melt butter in a 10-inch skillet. Add morels. Sauté slowly, until thoroughly cooked and tender. This will take 10 – 15 minutes.

Pickling and canning are not recommended for morel mushrooms.

There are no research-based processing times for canning morels.

Sources

Ammirati, J., Traquair, J., & Horgen, P. 1985.

Poisonous mushrooms of Northern United States and Canada. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Andress, E., & Harrison, J. 1999. *So Easy to Preserve.* Athens: University of Georgia Cooperative Extension Service.

Fisher, D. & Bessette, A. 1992. *Edible Wild Mushrooms of North America: A Field-to-Kitchen Guide.* Austin: University of Texas Press.

Freutel, S. 2004. "This Story Has Two Morels." Retrieved March, 2005, from Montana State University, MSU News Service website, www.montana.edu/news/1088547463.html

Kuo, M. December 2002. "Preserving and Drying Morels." Retrieved from MushroomExpert.Com, www.mushroomexpert.com/morels/drying.html

Mushroom Council Research and Information Website, <http://mushroomcouncil.org>

Parker, H. 1996. *Alaska's Mushroom: A Practical Guide.* Anchorage: Alaska Northwest Books.

Stewart, E. "Pennsylvania Has Its Share of Tasty Wild Mushrooms, Too." Retrieved March, 2005, from Pennsylvania State University, Agricultural Information Services Press Release, [http://aginfo.](http://aginfo.psu.edu/PSP/03psp/pr/03128_pr.html)

psu.edu/PSP/03psp/pr/03128_pr.html

Weber, N. 1988. *A Morel Hunter's Companion.* Lansing: Tow Peninsula Press.

Woodland Foods, Inc. "Morels and Summer Vegetables." Dried-Mushrooms, www.dried-mushrooms.us/recipe-morels-and-summer-vegetables.html

Village of Muscoda. April, 2005. "Morel Mushroom Stroganoff" from MUSCODA, Morel Mushroom Capital of Wisconsin, www.muscoda.com/recipe9.html

Additional websites

The Great Morel: A Tribute to Shroomers, www.thegreatmorel.com/info.html

Sonya Senkowsky. 2001. "Morel hunting" (radio script) from ARCTIC Science Journeys. Retrieved April, 2005 from www.uaf.edu/seagrant/NewsMedia/01ASJ/06.29.01morels.html

Additional publications

For more information about hunting morels, permit requirements, harvesting and marketing, see Cooperative Extension publication FNH-00021, *Alaska Mushroom Guide for Harvesting Morels.*

For more information, contact your local Cooperative Extension Service office or Julie Cascio, Extension Faculty, Health, Home and Family Development, at 907-745-3677 or jmccascio@alaska.edu or Marci Johnson, Health, Home and Family Development Program Assistant, at 907-786-6330 or anmjj@uaa.alaska.edu. Revised August 2009.

**Visit the Cooperative Extension Service website at
www.uaf.edu/ces or call 1-877-520-5211**