YELLOW MOREL

LIFE FORM
Fungus

PART USED
Mushroom fruiting body

SCIENTIFIC NAME
Morchella esculenta

COMMON
Yellow morel

OJIBWE
Genwaakizid waazashkwedowin

HMONG
Nceb Plab Nyuj Daj

SPANISH
Colmenilla

CAUTIONS
Raw and undercooked morels will cause severe gastro-intestinal distress.

Morel lookalikes:
- False morel *Gyromitra esculenta*
- Early morel *Verpa bohemica*
- Half-free morel *Morchella semilibera*

PRODUCT
- Look for yellow morels in hardwood forests; occasionally found with conifers.
- Most frequently associated with elms.

HARVEST
- Blooming lilacs and dandelions often signal the start of morel season.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC
- Hard to find and with a short season, morel mushrooms fetch excellent prices at farmers’ markets and cooperatives.

REGULATORY
- Minnesota statute regulates commercial mushroom harvest.

CAUTIONS
- Though generally easily identified, yellow morels are sometimes confused with other mushroom species.
- DO NOT EAT any mushroom unless you are certain of a positive identification.

Location
DISTRIBUTION and HABITAT
Morels are found throughout Minnesota in hardwood forests and occasionally in conifer woods. They are most frequently found around elms when the bark is sloughing off the tree. Sometimes they are found around dying cottonwood trees along rivers. Note: The black morel is more prevalent under aspen trees and, in the northern part of the state, in conifer woods.

Identification
DESCRIPTION
Morels are conical, oval or pinecone shaped. Their surfaces are covered with pits that are irregular in shape, giving it a honeycomb appearance. They are up to 6 inches or more in height, larger during the latter part of the season. Their colors are variable: yellow, yellow brown or darker, sometimes grayish. There is no separation between the cap and the stem portions, and the entire fruiting body is hollow inside.

The stem is off-white to buff and sometimes covered with short, fine hairs giving it a velvety appearance.

CAUTION (LOOK-ALIKES)
The ability to recognize morel look-alikes is essential when collecting morels for food.

*Gyromitra esculenta*, false morel, is sometimes confused with morels. This mushroom contains a toxin that accumulates in the body, and may eventually cause severe gastrointestinal distress requiring hospitaliza-
**Uses**

**GENERAL**
Morels are prized for culinary uses.

**SOCIO-CULTURAL**
Difficult to find and with a short gathering season, morels are legendary among mushroom appreciators. Their arrival is eagerly awaited and celebrated with forays, festivals and feasts.

**ECONOMIC**
Markets are well-established for wild gathered morels, which are difficult to cultivate.

**Harvest**

**WHAT TO HARVEST**
Harvest the caps and stems above the ground. Do not pick fruiting bodies below 1.5 inches high; allow them to mature. Do not harvest fruiting bodies that are brown or reddish and crumbly, as they are past their prime and not usable. Morels should not be collected in or near areas where chemical pesticides may have been used, such as golf courses and agricultural lands.

**WHEN TO HARVEST**
Reports of fruiting morels range from late April through the end of May. The farther north you go, the later the fruiting. The blooming of lilacs and dandelions is sometimes used as a cue that conditions are right for morel fruiting to begin.

**HOW TO HARVEST**
Use a plain sharp knife, such as a pocket-knife. Cut the stem cleanly above ground level. Lacking a knife, pinch off at the bottom of the stems, but using a knife is preferable.


To learn more about mushroom identification, visit the North American Mycological Association website at http://z.umn.edu/mushroomid

CAUTION
Older mushrooms can be wormy.

Handling
STORAGE
Morels may be brushed with a soft brush to remove surface debris. You must also check the mushrooms for insects, especially inside the cap. Store in a well ventilated, cool and dry location such as a refrigerator. Morels should not be wet before storage. Allow them to air-dry, but do not dehydrate. Refrigerated storage can extend their shelf life one or two days and help retain their flavor.

TRANSPORT
Transport during harvest in a flat-bottomed basket so as not to compact or break morels. Baskets should be porous even on the bottom to allow for spore dispersal, which promotes mushroom establishment and future supply. Although less desirable, you may use paper bags. Never use plastic bags as they promote condensation.

Markets
Consider farmers markets and restaurants, but recognize that mushroom commercialization is regulated by Minnesota Food Code (Chapter 4626.0155 Wild Mushrooms).

Regulations
Foraging regulations vary by land management unit. As responsible stewards of our lands, individuals are responsible for checking all regional and local park rules to ensure compliance with the law.

Morel and other mushrooms may be legally gathered for non-commercial use from state forests, parks, recreation areas or waysides in Minnesota. Minnesota Rule 6100.0900 Subpart 2E states that, “Collecting or possessing naturally occurring plants in a fresh state in state parks is prohibited, except that edible fruit and mushrooms may be harvested for personal, non-commercial use.”

Minnesota Rule 6136.0400 Subpart 2 prohibits foraging of all mushrooms in scientific and natural areas. “It is unlawful for any person to destroy, injure, damage, molest, or remove any natural resources within scientific and natural areas. . . .”

Minnesota trespass laws prohibit individuals from foraging mushrooms on private lands. Minnesota Statute 609.605 states, “A person is guilty of a misdemeanor if [that] person intentionally . . . enters the premises of another with intent to take or injure any fruit [a mushroom would be considered a fruit], fruit trees, or vegetables growing on the premises, without the permission of the owner or occupant.”

Always seek written permission of private landowners and do your part to build positive relationships with them. Many landowners, if asked, would be happy to allow foraging for mushrooms on their lands.