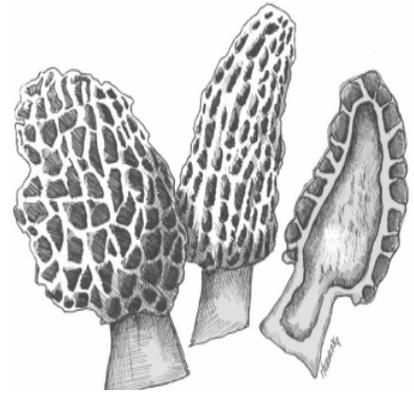


MOREL MUSHROOMS



Illustrated by Margaret Herring

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, for best flavor cook and eat your treasure as soon after harvest as possible.

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 and 35 degrees Fahrenheit. Wrap them in a paper bag or waxed paper. Non-porous plastic bags are not the best choice as plastic speeds up 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 two to three days. For longer storage, mushrooms should be frozen or dried.

Morels and Summer Vegetables

- 1½ ounces DRIED morels, reconstituted
(see directions to reconstitute page 3)
- 1 medium sweet bell pepper
- 2 small zucchini
- 2 Tablespoons olive oil
- 1 Tablespoon minced onion
- 1 small clove minced garlic
- 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 until golden. Add the morels and cook 2 minutes. 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 Teflon-coated 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 one to two inches of water into pot, 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 five 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 page 4 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 20 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 or 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 temperatures. 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° Fahrenheit. If your oven does not go this low, then 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 to 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 three 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, simmer 20-30 minutes or until they have returned to their original shape. Use a ratio of one part mushroom to 3 parts water. Cook according to recipe.
- 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.

Morel Mushroom Stroganoff

1 pound beef (sirloin or your favorite cut)
1 finely chopped medium onion
3/4-teaspoon nutmeg
2 cups sour cream (regular or light)
1/2 cup beef stock
1 1/2 cups dried morel mushrooms,
(See directions to reconstitute, page 3)
1/2 teaspoon dried basil
Salt to taste

Reconstitute morels. Cut beef in 3 to 4 inch strips and brown over high heat. Reduce heat to medium. Add onions and sauté until soft. Drain morels thoroughly - squeeze out excess water.

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 5-6 people.

Sautéed Morels

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

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

Pickling and Canning are not recommended for morel mushrooms.

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

Written by: Julie Cascio, Extension Home Economist, Mat-Su/Copper River Cooperative Extension District and Marci Johnson, Extension Home Economics Program Assistant
Reviewed and edited by Kristy Long, Ph.D., Foods & Home Economics Specialist, UAF Cooperative Extension Service and Sonja Koukel, Extension Home Economist, Southeast Alaska Cooperative Extension District

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Additional Web sites:

The Great Morel Site: A Tribute to Shroomers Web site: <http://www.thegreatmorel.com/info.html>

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For more information about hunting morels, permit requirements, harvesting and marketing, see *Alaskan Mushroom Guide for Harvesting Morels*, University of Alaska Fairbanks Cooperative Extension Service, April, 2005



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