

False morels differ from true morels in two obvious ways:

1. The cap surface has lobes, folds, flaps or wrinkles, but it does not have pits and ridges like a true morel. You might say their caps bulge outward instead of being pitted inward.
2. The bottom edge of the cap of a false morel hangs free around the stem, like a skirt. On true morels, the bottom edge of the cap is attached to the stem.

Information from

<http://www.conservation.state.mo.us/nathis/mushrooms/mushroom/mush4.html>

For local information on the Internet, see www.fungaljungal.org or contact **The Western Montana Mycological Association** at:

WMMA
PO Box 7306
Missoula, Montana 59807



CAUTION

The Missoula City-County Health Department has received two reports of people becoming ill after eating Morel mushrooms purchased from the Farmers' Market this season.

Be Morel Aware

- **Cut Morels in half to make certain they are hollow. If they are not, discard the mushroom.**
- **Cook Morel mushrooms thoroughly before eating. Raw Morels can cause illness.**

Know Your Morels

TRUE MOREL MUSHROOMS



Common Morel



3. *Morchella semilibera*



Black Morel

(*Morchella* spp.)

Description: Sponge, pinecone and honeycomb mushroom-the nicknames of the morel-are all appropriate. Morels are easy to recognize. The surface of a morel is covered with definite pits and ridges, and the bottom edge of the cap is attached directly to the stem. Size: 2" to 12" tall.

There are three common species of morels:

1. The common morel (*Morchella esculenta*):

When young, this species has white ridges and dark brown pits and is known as the "white morel." As it ages, both the ridges and the pits turn yellowish brown, and it becomes a "yellow morel." If conditions are right the "yellow morel" can grow into a "giant morel," which may be up to a foot tall.

2. The black morel or smoky morel (*Morchella elata*): The ridges are gray or tan when young, but darken with age until nearly black. The pits are brown and elongated. These morels are best when picked young; discard any that are shrunken or have completely black heads.

When and Where: From spring to early summer. Morels are found on the ground in a variety of habitats, including moist woodlands and in river bottoms.

Cooking: All Morel mushrooms require cooking. Eating raw Morel mushrooms may cause illness.

Cautions: Morels are quite distinctive, but there is a small chance they could be confused with false morels. See below for ways to distinguish true morels from false morels.

FALSE MOREL MUSHROOMS



False morels are difficult to treat in an article on edible and poisonous mushrooms, because they so clearly fit both categories. On one hand, many people have enjoyed eating false morels for years and may even consider them a favorite wild mushroom. On the other, false morels have definitely caused serious illnesses and deaths in the United States.

Note: Because False Morels have definitely caused deaths, we cannot recommend that you eat them.

The problem seems to involve the amount of a toxic chemical, called monomethyl hydrazine (MMH), present in these mushrooms. MMH causes diarrhea, vomiting and severe headaches, and occasionally it can be fatal. However, because of different cooking techniques and different individual sensitivities to MMH, false morels poison some people but leave others unaffected. In addition, false morels in some areas of the country contain more MMH than in other areas. All this makes these mushrooms a very doubtful group as far as edibility is concerned.

False morels have wrinkled, irregular caps that are brainlike or saddle-shaped. They may be black, gray, white, brown or reddish. Size 2" to 8" tall. False morels are found in spring, summer and fall, on the ground in woodlands. (See back panel for more information)