Hunting Mushrooms—Who Needs a License and Who Doesn’t

By Janet Hackert, Nutrition Specialist

Mushrooms are in season. And although a person does not need a license to hunt them, if someone wants to sell them, a licensed or certified inspector must attest to their safety first.

When hunting mushrooms, it is important to be 100% sure you know the mushrooms you find are safe to eat. For example, morel mushrooms vary in size and color, but one identifying factor for them is their hollow, cone- or globe-shaped head connected at the base to a hollow neck. The convolutions on the head make them look very porous. The cap is from one to five inches high and the stem is about the same height. They are generally found in various shades of brown from tan to black. A description and picture of morels (and other edible types) can be found on the Missouri Department of Conservation’s web site - http://mdc.mo.gov/discover-nature/outdoor-recreation/how/mushrooms/edible-mushrooms. The Harrison County Extension office also has paper copies of the brochure.

If it is a morel, as described above, it is safe to eat. If, however, it is shaped and sized similarly, but is NOT hollow, it is poisonous. So be very careful.

If you find lots or grow them yourself, you may consider selling some. The state of Missouri requires that a certified inspector confirm that they are a safe variety for sale. Certification is done through the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services. Since certification classes are not yet available in Missouri, the department has a process for recognizing certification from other states, such as Iowa. Heather Benedict, Agronomy Specialist with MU Extension in Harrison County (660-425-6434; BenedictH@missouri.edu), has more information on this process.

Mushrooms keep in the refrigerator for only 2-3 days. If you have more than you can use in that time, consider freezing some within a day of picking to maintain best quality. MU Extension has a guide, GH1507, Freezing Unusual Fruits and Vegetables, to explain how to do that: http://extension.missouri.edu/explorepdf/hesguide/foodnut/gh1507.pdf. Drying is another option and is described in publication GH1563, How To Dry Foods at Home, http://extension.missouri.edu/explorepdf/hesguide/foodnut/gh1563.pdf

Unlike some other mushrooms that are enjoyed raw, morels must be well cooked to be eaten safely and avoid the irritation to the stomach that can otherwise occur. The first step, and perhaps the most tedious, is getting them clean. All the cracks and crevices make for lots of places for sand, dirt and small insects to hide. To clean, rinse several times quickly and carefully under running water to remove dirt and sand. Then set in salt water for about an hour, changing
the water often to draw the bugs out. Avoid over-soaking as this can dilute the flavor. Use freshly collected mushrooms within two to three days.

For more information on this or any other subject, contact your local University of Missouri Extension office. MU Extension programs are open to all.

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