



The Hunt Decoded

*Everything you need to know
to mushroom like a pro*

By Bill Stevenson



The Enoki

Agaricus bisporus is an edible mushroom which has two color states while immature – white and brown – both of which have various names.



The Crimini

Agaricus bisporus is an edible mushroom which has two color states while immature – white and brown – both of which have various names.



The Chanterelle

Agaricus bisporus is an edible mushroom which has two color states while immature – white and brown – both of which have various names.



The Oyster

Agaricus bisporus is an edible mushroom which has two color states while immature – white and brown – both of which have various names.

Morels are America’s mushroom, more so than any other. It may be because they’re widespread, they’re easy to identify, and they come up in the spring, giving people a reason to get out and enjoy warm weather after a long winter. Or, it could be they’re popular simply because they taste so good. Morels are so prized they sell for up to \$20 a pound in grocery stores where I live. If you have any doubt about a mushroom, don’t keep it.

1. How to Start

While you’re out in the woods this fall, you may be distracted by the leaves above, but choose to glance down at the path below, and you’ll get to play hide-and-seek with forest fungi.

Treasures lay beneath the foliage.

There is no pirate map that will lead you to the chanterelles. And you won’t find an X that marks the spot of porcini.

Mushroom-hunting requires knowledge, research, and the love of uncovering things. Here are two morels in the wild.

Notice the pits, the distinctive conical shape, and the way the bottom

of the cap (the pitted part) is attached near the bottom of the stem.

Avoid the half-free morel (bottom photo), which has a longer stem and a cap that attaches near the top, looking like an umbrella.

These mushrooms can cause some people to have cramps or other forms of gastrointestinal distress.

2. Where to Look

Morels live in and on the edge of forested areas. Look for ash, aspen, elm, and oak trees, around which morels often grow.

Early in the spring as the ground is warming, you’ll find them on south-facing slopes in fairly open areas. As the season progresses, go deeper into the woods and onto north-facing slopes.

Well-drained, sandy soils like this creek bottom make good hunting spots as well. You’ll find the first morels of the year when daytime highs reach the 60s and lows stay above 40 degrees.

You cover ground until you find one, then slow down and search the area carefully. Concentrate the rest of your hunt on similar areas, on the theory that you’ve found the “pattern” for the day.

3. Know the Growing Conditions

Okay, this is tricky to lock down because every region has a different eco-system. But don’t worry because Miller has bi-coastal foraging experience in both northern California and upstate New York.

The East Coast is treated to reishi

and chaga mushrooms during spring and summer, while the West Coast enjoys an extended hunting season through fall and winter.

Mushrooms like rain. Miller’s hunting forecast is, “after it rains two inches, wait two weeks.” Mushrooms

don’t just pop up the day after it rains. They need time to grow and sprout.

Your guidebook, or friend, or club you joined will be crucial in helping you assess your local environment which will clue you into where the mushrooms are hiding.

4. Identification

You’ll find both edible and toxic mushrooms on your hunt. Don’t pop anything into your mouth.

But feel free to pick everything that piques interest. “You can handle anything—smell it, hold it,” Miller encourages. “Even picking non-edibles expands your knowledge of

what an edible is.”

Picking mushrooms—even ones you won’t eat—is not a waste. In Italy, the law says to collect mushrooms in a basket with holes so that the mushroom’s spores can spread as you continue to trek. So pluck and educate yourself.

5. Clean, Cook and Eat

Now that you’ve TRIPLED-checked your mushrooms are edible (right?!), it’s time to finally enjoy them.

Keep your haul in a paper bag in the fridge because while “you don’t want them to sweat,” keeping them this way allows them to “stay moist while also allowing them to breathe.”

You know they’ve gone bad when they’re slimy and stinky. If they smell close to the aroma of when you picked them, they’re still good.

“Mushrooms contain chitin, which is what bug shells are made out of,” Miller says. So they’re basically more easily digested when cooked.

If you find yourself with more mushrooms than you have people invited to dinner, you can purchase a dehydrator to keep mushrooms longer.

