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HELVEVIA

Magazine for Members of the Swiss Society of New Zealand Inc

FLORA IN SWITZERLAND

Morel

Morels can be found in Jura - but unless you come from a family that has gathered mushrooms for many generations there or you are exceedingly lucky and stumble on them by chance, you won't find them.

Morels have a convoluted or pitted head, or cap, vary in shape, and occur in diverse habitats. The edible *M. esculenta*, found in woods during early summer, is among the most highly prized edible fungi. The bell morel, (*Verpa*), an edible mushroom with a bell-shaped cap, is found in woods and in old orchards in early spring. False morels, or lorchels, are represented by the genera *Gyromitra* and *Helvella*. Most species of *Gyromitra* are poisonous.

Every spring the woods are filled with people searching for edible morels. Morels are wonderfully delicious and fairly easy to identify. Their appearance in the spring occurs at a time when people are eager to resume outdoor activities. Fresh morels are offered for retail purchase at SFr 60 - 80 per kilo. No wonder mushroom hunters take to the woods to gather this delicacy for free.

Favorite spots for collecting morels are a closely guarded secret. Collectors are so passionate that festivals are held in the United States with prizes awarded for the largest morel, the most morels, the best recipe, etc.

Morels are the fruiting body of a fungus that lives in the soil. When the soil temperature and moisture conditions are right the fungus produces morels, containing the spores of the fungus. The wind carries the spores to new habitats, where they germinate and produce a new individual of the morel fungus. The pitted, spongy cap on the white stem contains the spores. Some caps are black, gray or even white depending on the species of morel fungus.

All morels are related to cup fungi (ascomycetes). The ascus, a special cell containing the spores, is the common feature of all ascomycetes.



Morel esculenta

Every identified organism in the world has one scientific name, in Latin, but may have many common names. *Morchella esculenta* is known as the Common Morel, but it is just as difficult or easy to find as any other species, and delicious. Another common name for this morel is the Sponge Mushroom.