

# nyms



Spring 2006 New York Mycological Society Newsletter

## Morel Majority

Admittedly, it has been a strange winter, alternating between balmy and miserable weather, not quite a cold season, but with plenty to remind us that we're not getting off scott-free. I think it's gone quite fast. I can't believe that morel season is almost here! And after the wonderful lecture on March 12 by Michael Kuo, author of the new book, *Morels*, I'm pretty sure we're all salivating.

Of course, if you were among the lucky thirty five to attend the tasting after the lecture, salivating has maybe given way to anticipating more comparisons of tastes among the different morels and their habitats. Inside this issue are more details and pictures from the March 12 event. Look for the morel breakfast information as well.

You will also find articles devoted to the morel coming from Dennis Aita's deep appreciation of the *Morchella* genus and its environs. He has reviewed Michael Kuo's *Morels* for us. And Dennis consented to be interviewed by this newsletter to enlighten us about likely habitats in our area in which to find morels. Paul Sadowski gives his award picks for other spring mushrooms. With recipes for *Polyporus squamosus*, a.k.a. Dryad's Saddle, from Elinoar Shavit and morel recipes from Dennis, maybe we can all sort through the taste controversies.

Elinoar will also be our final lecturer of the 2006 Emil Lange Winter Lecture Series on Sunday April 9. Her topic is: *Mushrooms of the Holy Land*.

Besides the spring fever for mushrooms, the summer and fall foray dates are in. Our Chanterelle Weekend is planned. Look inside for the details and registration form. As a special note that is repeated inside, remember to book this weekend early. Claudine Michaud, coordinator of the Weekend, tells me that it is crucial to get a minimum of ten participants committed as early as possible to get the accommodation rate.

The NAMA foray will be in western Canada (Alberta) in the middle of August. Details are at the NAMA website: <http://namyco.org>. The NEMF foray that will take place in northern Quebec in the beginning of September is also open for registration. See the insert page for the information and form. The Catskill Weekend is set for the middle of September. More information is listed in this issue, and check with Paul Sadowski to register. Also, see the walks schedule for more information on upcoming walks. See the sidebar on page three for a reminder on walks etiquette.

The membership coupon is here again. Please don't forget to send in your dues. It's too late for the early rate, but join and let others know about getting in on the events.

Thanks.  
Pam

### ≡ Inside This Issue ≡

Dryad Saddle Battle—The Not-So-Right of Spring takes on the Recipe Page.  
Dennis Aita tells all in an interview, a book review, a recipe and a tasting event  
Forays, Forms, Facts and Figuratives  
Summer getaway hunt in Vermont  
A cure for the common cold

### ↘ Upcoming Events ↙

*Details on most of these events can be found inside the newsletter.*

Sunday, April 9  
Elinoar Shavit, final lecture in 2005-6 of the Emil Lange Winter Lecture Series; also annual business meeting.

Saturday, April 29  
Morel Breakfast and hunt.

Saturday, May 6  
Morel hunt.

Friday-Sunday, July 28-30  
Chanterelle Weekend at White Pine Lodge, Londonderry, VT.

Thursday-Sunday, August 17-20  
NAMA Foray at Hinton Training Centre near Jasper Nat'l Park, Hinton, Alberta, Canada. Details at <http://namyco.org/events/index.htm>

Friday-Monday, September 1-4  
NEMF Foray at Saint Anthony's Hermitage, Lac-Bouchette, Quebec, Canada.

Sunday, Sept 10  
Joint NYMS/COMA picnic and walk at Fahnestock State Park, Putnam County, New York.

Friday-Sunday, September 15-17  
Catskills Weekend at Crystal Spring House, Big Indian, Ulster County, NY.



## NYMS Newsletter

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All statements and opinions written in this newsletter belong solely to the individual author and in no way represent or reflect the opinions or policies of the New York Mycological Society.

*Submissions for the summer issue of the NYMS newsletter must reach the editor by June 1, 2006.* Various formats are acceptable for manuscripts. Address questions to Pam Kray, editor. See above for addresses.

## Morel Breakfast *Holy Fungus!*

We are again invited to kick off the mushroom walks season with the morel breakfast and walk on Saturday April 29. Breakfast will start at 9:15 at Mimi and Howard's home. Only current members may attend. Maggie Vall is coordinating this event. If you need a ride or have an empty seat in your vehicle, call Maggie (212-877-1312). She will try to match availability with need.

If you are receiving this newsletter, you should be a paid member and should also receive the insert with the breakfast information and directions. A mailing has gone out to the unpaid members with a cutoff date for dues in order to make sure that Alice Barner, our treasurer, is not over-run with last-minute requests for membership status and admission to the breakfast. Perhaps we should mark our calendars now for December and January to be dues-paying months for all of us to make it easier on Alice.

The New York Mycological Society is pleased to present Elinor Shavit as the final 2006 lecturer of the Emil Lange Winter Lecture Series. She will speak on *Mushrooms of the Holy Land*, based on interviews with Bedouins, Druze and other long-time residents of the region. Definitely a must-attend for anyone interested in mushroom use around the world.

Our annual business meeting, postponed from the snowed-out February 12 meeting date, will take place briefly after the featured lecture.

All of this happens in our usual spot in the Linder Theater of the American Museum of Natural History at 1 PM. Enter the museum at any entrance and tell the guard on duty that you are attending the New York Mycological Society meeting for free entry.



## Magnificent Chanterelles!

### Chanterelle Weekend—July 28-30, 2006

The NYMS Chanterelle Weekend will take place on July 28-30, 2006, in Londonderry, Vermont. The area holds many forests to explore and, in most years, we have collected plenty of chanterelles and other edible mushrooms for Saturday's dinner as well as mushrooms to take home. Paul Sadowski will be the onsite expert mycologist for mushroom identification.

The approximate cost is \$120 per person (a deposit of at least \$30 must be received before May 15 to hold your place, details below). The price covers two nights' lodging at the charming White Pine Lodge and six meals, including Friday and Saturday night dinners, Saturday and Sunday breakfasts, and picnic lunches on Saturday and Sunday. The barbeque on Saturday night is a real treat!

Early registration is crucial to making this event happen. We need a minimum of ten people committed to the weekend or the price becomes prohibitive. Get in touch with Claudine as soon as possible to reserve your spot (registration form p.11). If you need transportation or if you can provide a ride, be sure to let Claudine know. She will try to match availability with need. Any questions? Call Claudine Michaud at either 718-622-5834 or 631-749-4398. Or email: [michaudhenri@aol.com](mailto:michaudhenri@aol.com).

## Morels in March

Michael Kuo, author of the new book, *Morels* (see review, p. 4), spoke on Sunday March 12, as part of our regular Emil Lange Winter Lecture Series. The excellent and informative talk was followed by an even more satisfying event: a morel tasting held at Maria Reidelbach's place. Dennis Aita was the chef and Maria assisted.

They cooked 4 different "batches" of morels. In order to have some fresh morels, we ordered cultivated ones from Michigan. We also got dried ones from southern Oregon (or northern California) in the Cascade Range. We tasted the different morels in pairs: natural black vs. burn-site black and cultivated *M. rufobrunnea* (looks like *esculenta*)

*cont. p. 2*

# Looking for Morels in All the Right Places

An Interview with Dennis Aita, February 26, 2006

By Pam Kray and Maria Reidelbach

For newer mushroom enthusiasts, it is sometimes daunting to head out alone to look for edible fungi. Morels, being as distinctive and tasty as they are, invite hunters. However, they are elusive mushrooms, too. Besides their ability to camouflage themselves in leaves and vegetation, they prefer some particular conditions for fruiting. We asked Dennis Aita, long-time NYMS member and morel enthusiast to talk about where and when to look for morels. Right about now, you may be wondering how we got Dennis to spill some hardcore information on where to find morels in our area. The answer is in one word: wine!

## Morels and Our Region

PK: Would you like to say how long you've been picking mushrooms and how long you've been a member?

DA: Oh, I joined the Society in October of 1982. I picked mushrooms before that, but I didn't eat them before that. Basically, I've been avidly morel hunting since '83.

PK: What are the kinds of morels and what are the timeframes that we're going to be looking for them?

DA: Here in the Northeast, we have basically four different types of true morels: *Morchella semilibera* (the half-free morel), *M. esculenta*, *M. angusticeps* (the black morels), and we have *M. deliciosa* (also called the tulip morel because they are found around tulip poplars). DNA is showing that there are different species within these four groups. In the United States, apparently, there are about fourteen different types of morels that have been found by DNA sequencing. In our area, we don't have all fourteen types, but we do find at least two different types of *deliciosas*, under hickory, ash, even apple trees. And there may be a couple of different types of black morels. *Esculentas*—we don't know how many types we have. That is to be determined.

PK: Before we talk about which morels are under which trees, can you say something about the time differences among them that we can expect for morels coming up? I know that the black morels come out earlier than *esculentas*.

DA: Right. The black morels are the first true morels to come out, the first of the *Morchella* genus. They come out—it could be in the beginning of April, sometimes around the third week of April in our region give or take. Then, after that, it can be a week or ten days later depending on temperature, we get the *semiliberas*. After that the *esculentas* come out. Then after that, the *deliciosas*, the smaller ones, come out.

An important point to make is that they come out earlier the further south you go into the warmer climates and come out later in cooler climates.

PK: Can we define what we call our region? And can you talk about the spring temperatures moving at about 100 miles per week and at 100 feet per day in altitude?

*cont. p. 8*

*Morels in March, cont. from p. 3*

vs. burn-site *esculenta*. With a few varying opinions, overall consensus was that the burn-site morels had distinctive, somewhat smoky tastes, but that while the cultivated were too mild altogether, the “natural” ones were the best tasting of all.

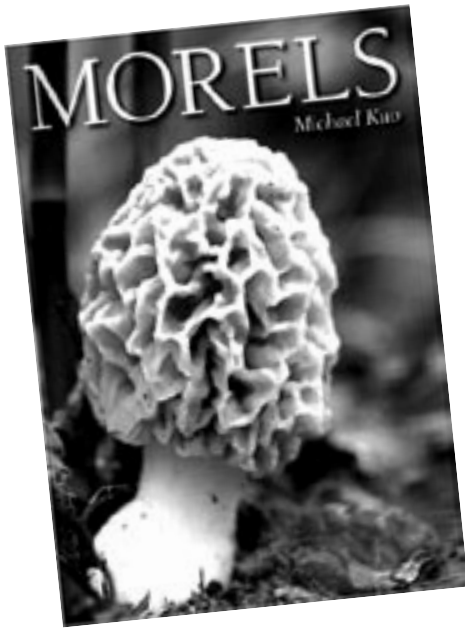
The event sparked the “taste” for more such events, especially more morel comparisons and some investigations into which wines might go with certain mushrooms. Hopefully we will do more such events in a larger place so that more people can attend. That said, the tasting events at Maria's have been incredible. Thanks to Gary Lincoff for inspiring and organizing the event and to Maggie Vall and Claudine Michaud for their assistance. Tremendous thanks to Dennis Aita for creating his delicious recipe, for ordering the morels and for cooking the morels, and to Maria Reidelbach for hosting *Morels in March!* 🍄

## Remember!

Stay responsibly in touch with us. If your telephone number, mailing or email address changes, please contact Paul Sadowski, secretary with your new information. An additional note for listserv users: please remember to set your spam filter to be able to receive listserv emails.

*NYMS walks policy:* We meet when public transportation arrives. Check the walks schedule for other transportation notes. Walks last 5-6 hours and are of moderate difficulty except where noted. Bring lunch, water, knife, and a basket for mushrooms. Leaders have discretion to cancel walks in case of rain or very dry conditions. Be sure to check your email or contact the walk leader before a walk to see if it has been canceled for some reason. Non-members' attendance is \$5.

*Warning:* Many mushrooms are toxic. Neither the Society nor individual members are responsible for the identification or edibility of any fungus.



*Michael Kuo, the author of Morels, has spent a lot of time thinking about morels...and in the springtime spends a lot of time looking for them. And that is how the book opens—with lots of good morel-hunting stories—and many of them are quite funny. The author is also an excellent writer, not surprising since he is an English teacher.*

### ≡ MycoSites ≡

Looking for morel websites? A google search on the word, “morels,” yielded 500,000 results!

Editor’s pick—Michael Kuo’s site:  
[www.mushroomexpert.com](http://www.mushroomexpert.com)

Some others that look good:

[www.theforagerpress.com/fieldguide/mayfd.htm](http://www.theforagerpress.com/fieldguide/mayfd.htm)

[www.michiganmorels.com](http://www.michiganmorels.com)

[www.thegreatmorel.com/index.shtml](http://www.thegreatmorel.com/index.shtml)

[www.morelsgonewild.com](http://www.morelsgonewild.com)

And for the site of the annual morel mushroom festival:

[www.grantcounty.org/ci/muscoda/](http://www.grantcounty.org/ci/muscoda/)

## Book Review

### Morels

Michael Kuo,  
By Dennis Aita

It’s not often that one reads a mushroom book that combines up-to-date mycological information with the passion of the hunt. OK, passion may not be the best way to describe it. Obsession is probably closer. (It takes a morel obsessive to recognize another one.)

But this book has a lot more to offer than just good morel stories. There are excellent descriptions and keys to the true morels (*Morchella* species) as well as for the false morels, the *Gyromitras*. Michael knows how to create mushrooms keys. (See his excellent [MushroomExpert.com](http://MushroomExpert.com) website.) And the book offers numerous excellent photos for all the species and varieties mentioned. Six different mushroom photographers have contributed to *Morels*. Kuo also does a good job of describing many of the springtime indicators of morels such as the lilacs and apples flowering and the dandelions going to seed. The various morel habitats are well covered—where they grow and their associated trees. The author smartly includes pictures of the barks of the major eastern and midwestern trees under which morels can be found.

Kuo’s sections of the book that deal with the “theories” and the science of morels: how and why they grow where they grow, as well as the “species questions,” are very interesting. Morel mycelium—given the proper temperature, moisture, and aeration—will keep feeding on the available nutrients until conditions change. So when the nutrients run out or temperatures fall, the morel mycelium forms a hard mass, or sclerotium, in which the nutrients are stored until conditions change. During the spring, temperatures warm up and fruiting bodies—morels—come out. However, the sclerotium may form more mycelium and continue the feeding stage and not send out morel mushrooms.

Some of the other “how” and “why” questions are even less understood. For many years, it was an assumed fact that morels were saprophytic mushrooms, i.e., growing on dead or decaying material. But recent research has indicated that some species of morels appear to be mycorrhizal (forming a mutually symbiotic relationship with their host). They may actually be both, depending upon the situation. The author takes the view that morels *are* mycorrhizal and are just saprophytic in “disturbed environments.” That does not explain laboratory cultivation of morels, since no mycorrhizal fungus has ever been grown indoors to the fruiting state.

Michael Kuo does very good job when it comes to the “species questions.” He discusses the older morphological and biological species concepts as well as DNA analysis. It appears that there are four groups (complexes) of morels: yellows (*esculentas*), blacks, half-free (*semiliberas*), and *deliciosas*. It does now appear that *Morchella deliciosa* (tulip morel) is not a variety of *M. esculenta* but is a separate species. And what has been named *M. crassipes* (the fat-footed morel) is just a large mature *M. esculenta*. However, morels that look very similar have been found to have “significantly” different DNA, and conversely, morels that look very different—at all stages of development—have been found to have similar DNA.

The author has some other strong opinions that I disagree with, regarding washing morels, *Gyromitra esculenta*’s (in)edibility, and trespassing on private property. His practices may be responses to particular conditions that exist in his local region that differ here.

All in all, there aren’t many mushroom books that are page-turners; this book certainly is that... and much more. It is a detailed, highly informative, opinionated work that is a pleasure to read. It is an excellent book that I highly recommend. 🍄

# The Not-So-Right of Spring

By Paul Sadowski

As we wander the apple orchard or the elm windbreak in search of the brightest stars in the springtime firmament, the morels, it is likely that we will stumble across some of the lesser lights of the season. And since we share this season with the Academy Awards I thought to add a little shine to these fungi with awards appropriate to their more salient aspects.

## Most Numerous Mushroom of the Spring

*Agrocybe praecox*, the spring agrocybe, can be found growing on wood chips, or in lawns, sometimes in large troops. In the spring of 2003, the hillside at the north end of the Central Park reservoir gave one the impression that the reservoir must have been overfilled with them, pitching them down the hill. This mushroom has a tan cap, attached gills, brown spores, and a partial veil that gives way to a ring or ring zone on the whitish stem. *Edible with caution*; a number of look-alikes, some of which grow together with *A. praecox*, should not be eaten.

## Most Robust Mushroom of the Spring

*Stropharia rugosoannulata*, the wine cap. Also favoring wood chips, these large fleshy mushrooms start appearing in the spring and often make an encore when the weather cools again in the autumn. They start out with a wine-colored cap—hence their nickname—fading to grayish-white as the cap opens. Their attached gills start out whitish, gradually taking the purple color of their spores as they mature. The wine cap features a fleshy, split (rugose) ring or annulus on the stem. Terry Hayes, a longtime member of NYMS once brought some wine caps that she raised on her backyard compost heap to an event celebrating the art of John Cage. Cage, one NYMS' founders, was apparently one of the first to discover that *S. rugosoannulata* is a good edible.

## Most Magical Mushroom of the Spring

*Peziza badio-confusa*. This large, brown, maybe reddish-brown cup fungus can be found growing on the ground where and when you're looking for morels. If you find them, carefully cut their attachment to the soil and place them in the palm of your hand. At the point when your body heats the fungus to the right temperature, the asci (this fungus is an ascomycete) shoot their spores in unison, forming a magical cloud in a cup. This cup fungus is edible when cooked.

## Brainiest Mushroom of the Spring

*Gyromitra brunnea*, et al., the false morel. This ascomycete will fool you if you confuse brains with beehives. We find *G. brunnea* every year growing on the ground near one our favorite morel spots. It has a stem not unlike the morel, except that when cut, it is not completely hollow as is *Morchella*, but stuffed with cottony tissue. The similarity ends there. *G. brunnea* and its allies have reddish-brown caps that are convolutedly wrinkled, not honey-combed. A cross-section reveals not a hollow cap contiguous with the stem, but a chambered or lobed structure. This mushroom is poisonous. One can be sickened by merely standing near a pot of cooking *Gyromitras* as they throw off a jet fuel-like substance.

## Raciest Mushroom of the Spring

*Pluteus cervinus*, the fawn mushroom. Growing on wood, this brown to gray-brown mushroom has white gills that turn pinkish as the spores mature. The gill attachment is a perfect example of free gills; there is such a separation of gills from stem that it is often described as a racetrack. It is edible when young, but not choice. Be aware of *Entoloma vernum*, the early spring entoloma that also has pinkish, albeit attached, gills and is poisonous!

## Most Disappointing Mushroom of the Spring

*Polyporus squamosus*, Dryad's Saddle. If you are looking for morels among dead elms,

cont. p. 11



*Gyromitra brunnea*,  
Das Flein



*Peziza badio-confusa*,  
Peterson Field Guide Series, 1987 ed.



*Pluteus cervinus*,  
Peterson.



*Stropharia rugosoannulata*,  
Peterson.

## Dennis Aita's Morels in Cream Sauce

It doesn't seem to matter whether you use fresh or dried morels. The dried morels, when properly soaked and cooked, can come very close to the texture of fresh ones. (Some cooks actually prefer the flavor of dried ones!) I prefer not to wash fresh mushrooms unless necessary. While most of our *Morchella esculentas*, the blond and grey morels, grow on loamy soils, just about all of the black morels in our region grow on sandier soils and must be washed. Also, various critters inhabit the insides of the morels and their pits need to be cleaned out. I like to cut my fresh morels lengthwise to get a good view of the insides. Put them in a big bowl of water and really mix them. Remove them. If the water is sandy, repeat.

Most recipes call for soaking dried morels for thirty minutes, but their texture improves and approaches the fresh state with longer soaking—even overnight. After sufficient soaking, remove them, squeezing to remove most of the liquid. If the soaking liquid is the slightest bit sandy, strain it through cheesecloth, set it aside and put the morels back into a bowl of new water to clean further, repeating as necessary (save only the first soaking liquid). Squeeze the morels when finished.

Morels must be well cooked. I once left a nice portion of fresh morels with my father making this quite clear to him. He didn't listen and cooked them as many Italian-Americans do—a quick sauté. His friend found him on the floor in pain! Cooking dried morels for a long time is also important in getting the dried morels to approach the fresh state. I actually stew them in the soaking liquid.

Morels have a strong affinity for butter and cream—more so than any other mushroom that I know. To accent the richness, I introduce some acidity (and flavor) with some dry white wine, Vermouth or Madeira. I also love nutmeg and shallots with morels. Below is a basic recipe with a variation for pasta. Quantities are just guidelines; don't take them too literally.

2 ounces dried morels soaked in just enough water to cover (see above)

or ½ pound fresh morels, whole or cut up

reserved soaking liquid

3 Tbsp butter

2-3 Tbsp minced shallots (optional)

1/3 cup dry white wine, dry Madeira, or dry Vermouth

2/3 cup heavy cream

pinch or so of grated nutmeg

salt and pepper

Melt the butter in pan over low flame. If using shallots you need to use a very low flame, a heavy pan and lid so that they sweat, become translucent and don't burn! Add the morels and a little salt and pepper. Cook for several minutes, at least, allowing fresh morels to give up their liquid.

Add the wine, raise the temperature and reduce the liquid. Add all or most of the soaking liquid turn down the heat, put the lid on the pan and let the mushrooms stew for as long as your patience allows. Reduce liquid by raising temperature and removing lid. Add cream, taste for seasoning, and reduce until sauce is thickened. Serve over toasted bread.

Pasta variation: use white wine and add a few tablespoons of grated Parmigiano-Reggiano (or some other good quality mild grating cheese) as the sauce is thickening. Sometimes I also add some frozen baby peas or inch-size pieces of tiny asparagus when the cream has been added. Serve with pasta: fresh noodles such as fettuccine are perfect; macaroni such as penne is also good.



Morels,  
*Das Fleine Pilzbuch*, Germany, 1912

## Elinoar Shavit's Marinated Polyporus Squamosus

This is one of my family's favorite spring mushrooms. We only collect very young fruiting bodies and, for this preparation, use only those parts that a dull knife cuts smoothly through. The tougher stems are used for a hearty "chicken" stock. Enjoy!

3-4 packed cups P. squamosus slices	2 bay leaves
1/4 cup good extra virgin olive oil	1 small carrot sliced into thin disks
1 medium yellow onion, thinly sliced	1 small celery rib sliced horizontally
3 garlic cloves, crushed and sliced	1/4-1/3 cup distilled white vinegar
1 heaping tbs dry Italian seasoning herbs	3-5 tablespoons orange juice
1/4 tsp dried hot pepper flakes or a few drops of Tabasco	6-10 drops of extra dark sesame seed oil
	Salt to taste

Place the P. squamosus 'fans' on a cutting board and cut them into 1/4-inch wide long slices, from the base toward the edge.

In a large stainless steel sauté pan, heat the olive oil and add the Italian seasoning herb mix, bay leaves, crushed red pepper flakes, and stir lightly with a wooden spoon. On a high flame, add the onions and the garlic. Stir. Add the mushroom slices and toss them well. Add the celery and carrot and stir again. Lower the heat to moderate, cover partially, and sauté, stirring occasionally, until some juices form (5-7 minutes).

Add the orange juice, sesame seed oil, and 1/4 cup distilled vinegar. Sauté for an additional 2-3 minutes. Add salt, and taste the liquid. It should be as strong as or a bit stronger than you would want the final dish to be, because the cooked slices still have not absorbed all the flavors.

Add vinegar for extra tartness, balance by adding a little orange juice. Salt should be added carefully at the end. Transfer to a plastic container, and let cool. Cover and refrigerate for a few hours.

## Elinoar's Vegetarian Jewish Penicillin

10-15 large pieces of young but tougher parts of P. squamosus (about 1/3 of a large stock pot), cut into cubes	4 sprigs fresh dill
1 bunch parsley	1 very large onion, roughly chopped
5 medium to large carrots	3 bay leaves
1 large leek, green part included	4 garlic cloves, cut lengthwise
4 celery ribs	1 quart of good vegetable stock like Pacific's, or a vegetarian bouillon cube in 2 cups of boiling water.
1 large green pepper	A few tbsps good extra virgin olive oil
1 parsnip	Salt to taste

Wipe the mushroom pieces clean. Wash the vegetables well, do not peel them, and cut into large chunks. Wash the parsley and dill checking for sand. Cut the leeks in 2 lengthwise, take apart and wash well, watching for sand.

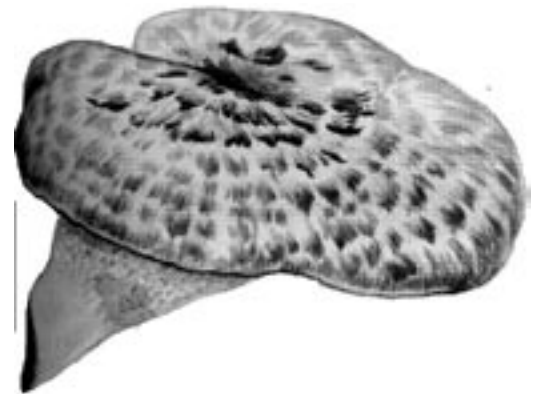
In a very large stock-pot, heat the olive oil and add the onion, bay leaves, garlic cloves and mushroom pieces. On high heat, toss them until the mushrooms start sweating, about 3-4 minutes. Add the vegetable stock and the rest of the ingredients except for the salt. Cover with plenty of water, almost to the top. Bring to a boil, lower the heat to a bubble, partially cover and let simmer for 2 to 3 hours. Add salt to taste.

If you wish to freeze some of the stock (it freezes very well for up to six months), it is better to remove the portion that you wish to freeze before adding the salt. Set aside to cool and freeze in tightly closed containers.

Let the stock stand uncovered until it has cooled enough to handle.

Pour the stock through a colander into a container fit for the refrigerator. Discard all the solids.

Use in any way you would use chicken soup (add noodles) or as wonderful liquids to other dishes, like stuffed morels.



P. Squamosus, Peterson.



*Aita, cont. from p. 3*

DA: OK. Let's say: a two-hour drive from New York City in any direction is our climatic region. What I'm saying is largely true in other parts of the Northeast and in the Middle Atlantic. If you were to drive 100 miles to the south, the morels would come out there approximately one week earlier, and similarly, if you were to drive 100 miles to the north, you've got to figure about a week later. But, in the progression of spring, elevation is another factor. You get cooler temperatures at higher altitudes, so spring progresses about 100 feet a day as you go up the mountain. It really does make a difference. I've seen it. You see morels start to grow on the sunny sides of slopes at low elevations. A week later you'll see them higher up or around the other side of the slope where it's cooler. At the beginning of the season, people should look at the warmer spots first.

PK: So, in our area, we have weather and temperature factors and soil factors for the trees that are associated with morels.

DA: So, We'll do temperature first: the morels are really temperature-regulated. That's why in some years, you'll see black morels the first week of April and some years the third week of April. Last year, we didn't see them 'til around the 20<sup>th</sup> of April. That is because of the soil temperature. It has to be around 46° or 47° before you'll start to see their little fruiting bodies. 50° is the key factor for *M. esculentas*. They knew that back in the 1950's.

MR: Is that 50° at night?

DA: No, that's the soil temperature. Apparently, it's a trigger for the primordia to start forming. That's, of course, given enough moisture. Moisture is not usually a problem in our area. Morels don't seem to need a lot of rainfall to get started, unlike boletes that seem to need a lot of rain to come out.

PK: Boletes are, then, less dependent on soil temp and more on rainfall?

DA: Yes. That seems to be the case. Morel mycelia are only two to three inches below surface in the soil.

PK: I know there is some overlap, but do they each have different trees that they're associated with?

DA: Yes, there are some that will come up in any of the habitats and some that are very restricted.

## Soil

PK: Then, can we talk about the trees and the soils that are associated with the different kinds of morels?

DA: Okay. In general, the morels do not like heavy soils. They like loamy, well-drained soils and even soils that are somewhat sandy. We don't tend to find them in swamps or in lakebeds with heavy clay soils.

PK: You mentioned in a previous article that the patterns in our area are related to the last glacial melt 13,000 years ago that gives the area some specific traits.

DA: Right. We have glacial soils and non-glacial soils. The glacial moraine bisected Long Island, New York City, New Jersey and Pennsylvania as well as some states to the west. To the north are glaciated soils. The glacier's movement mixed the rocks such that the surface soil, younger soils were more similar to the bedrock in pH. Soils to the south of New York City, residual soils, were untouched by glaciers in millions of years. Here, with the yearly, even rainfall patterns, minerals get leached from the top layers of the soil and the soil becomes acidic. The newer, glacial soils to the north reflect the basic pH of the bedrock. That is very good for morels: soil pH's are above 6.7 for black morels and for *esculentas* above 7.5.

PK: So, we will want to look around the Hudson River?

DA: Yes. We want to look around the glacial moraine line, slightly to the south and to the north. There are places to the south of the line, but you need to find specific, *colluvial* soils. These are on slopes that are getting bedrock, basic soils, from above. Occasionally, with the right *alluvial* soils along streams you can find morels, also, de-

*cont. p. 9*



Tulip Poplar



Apple



*Aita, cont. from p. 8*

pending on the kinds of trees. Even more than the trees the key is the soil. You can be seeing wonderful apple trees—ride around the Hudson River—I’ve done it all day, and not find any morels.

MR: Do you first determine if the area has the kind of soil you want?

DA: Yes.

MR: Is it variable?

DA: It doesn’t seem to be that variable. I think it’s more important that you have an idea of the soil. If you’re hunting at the right time of year--the apple blossoms are out and the lilacs are half in bloom--and you’re not seeing morels under the decaying apple and elm trees, then you should get in your car and drive somewhere else. Soil is the major factor, trees are the second factor.

PK: You’re just watching the vegetation for an idea of the soil temperature?

MR: Do you take a thermometer?

DA: Yes.

PK: Do you take a pH meter with you, too?

DA: Not anymore. I can see right away by looking at the woods whether I’m going to find morels. It’s a gestalt. Certain things we look for: cleavers, certain plants. If you’re going into woods where there’s no ground vegetation, that’s not a good sign for morels. And it’s not just the pH of the soil, whether it’s acidic or basic, it’s the texture of the soil as well. For example, there are places north of here where there is limestone in the soil but it’s mixed in with shale, which adds clay. Then you’re getting a heavy soil, a hard surface. Morels don’t like that. They prefer lighter, sandy soils. The trade off is that those are usually acidic, as we have in the coastal plain here, the Pine Barrens. The soil is so acidic. Elms aren’t going to grow. I used to go down into southern New Jersey before the developments were built to the apple orchards and we’d find the morels only in the sandy soil. Where the soil had more clay, the trees were healthy and there were no morels. In the sandier soil, the trees were decaying.

## Trees

PK: Okay, so let’s talk about the trees.

DA: In our area, that’s really elms and apples. Those are the major trees under which to find large quantities of *M. esculenta* and some of the other morels. Then, after that, we’re talking about ash and tulip (poplar) trees. There aren’t that many other trees that produce a lot of morels.

PK: We’re really talking about dying elms and dying apple trees.

DA: Right. That’s what we’re looking for, especially with the esculentas. We’re looking for old orchards with old trees that have been unattended. You see more dead branches than live branches. They don’t have to be dead, but it’s good that they’re dying. Apple trees usually die a lot slower. Once you find an apple orchard, you can go there for twenty or thirty or even more years to find morels. On the other hand, you have the elms, which, because of Dutch elm disease, die very quickly. People will find morels under any one tree, in ideal conditions, for maybe five years. When we find dying ash trees, they are good to search under. Old tulip trees, I hear black cherries. I’ve never found any under black cherries.

PK: At that point we’re not talking about esculentas or are we? Are we talking about deliciosas or black morels?

DA: In our area, dying trees seem pretty much related with esculentas. It could be in healthier woods we’ll see black morels and deliciosas. Semiliberas could be in different kinds of forests.

## \$64 Million Question

MR: Why dying trees?

DA: The elms are dying off because of Dutch elm disease.

MR: No, why are they found under dying trees?

DA: There’s the \$64 million question. No one seems to know the answer to that one.



Elm



White Ash

*Aita, cont. from p. 9*

Are these saprophytic or mycorrhizal relationships or both?

MR: What's the difference?

DA: A saprophytic fungus is living off of dead material, whereas the mycorrhizal is a symbiotic exchange between the fungus and its host, a tree in this case.

PK: So we don't know if the morel is a hospice nurse or a morgue attendant.

DA: Have you been saving that one up for this? Or both. It's an interesting question. They're just starting to study this. We're going to hopefully know more about this in two weeks. Maybe Michael will be able to tell us.

## Odds and Ends

PK: What about burn sites? We don't see them here?

DA: It's more of a phenomenon in the west. I have heard of people burning a pile of leaves and then finding them. I always thought it had to do with the nutrients. When you have burns, it does raise the pH because you get ash. And, also, in these conifer forests, they're not high storers of nitrogen. But, during a burn, nitrogen is converted in its released form to an available substance for new growth, like fungi, specifically morels. You also get other little ascos [ascomycetes] that will form in these burn-site areas. We have the dying trees we talk about, the elms, the apples, the ash trees, black cherry to some degrees, maybe dogwoods and other fruit trees. Then you have disturbed areas, like the burn sites, not important around here, landscaped areas, more out west but sometimes here, like around roadsides where there has been construction, where they've put down cement, which affects the alkalinity of the soil. Then you get combinations of things, like apple trees and ash trees that get disturbed, like when they cut down apple or elms and leave the stumps, and you'll get flushes around the stumps, or where they've pruned old apple trees, and the ones they've pruned will have morels and the others won't. Perhaps it's a shock to the tree and nutrients are given off. As a mature forest occurs, the trees absorb the nutrients, store them in their leaves and that acidifies the soil. As the trees die off the nutrients are returned to the soil, it becomes more basic. But really, nobody really knows. Let me just say, if people want to go looking for morels, really both sides of the Hudson, almost all the way to Albany, into western Massachusetts and Connecticut—those are the places to look for morels.

PK: You mentioned in your previous article from 1994 that we're really looking for groves of trees not individual trees.

DA: That is true for tulip poplars, but with elms, all you need to find is one elm in the right soil and you're set for the day. We call it elm hopping, where you get in the car and drive around looking for elms. You find an elm, get out and in the right area, you can find morels without even going into the woods. And apples, all you need are one or two apple trees that are decaying with the right kind of soil and you can find a bunch.

MR: How do you spot them?

DA: Okay. The black morels, when they're small are nearly impossible to see, but once you've seen one or two, then you know what you're looking for. Even the esculentas, it's a sense. Once you do it a while, it sort of registers. You can scan an area and something stands out as being different. Foreground/background. It's something you have to experience. The eyes get trained; I've seen people who, once they've found one morel under a tree, will spend ten minutes looking around that tree. That's the not the way to do it. When they're small and hard to see, even I have passed by and then the next person sees them. In an apple orchard, don't spend too much time under one tree, maximize your exposure, your profits so to speak.

PK: What kinds of bags or carrying vehicles for the mushrooms do you recommend? I've read that mesh bags are good to disperse the spores.

DA: There is no shortage of spores. Canvas bags are the best. Baskets are not for morels. It's not open woods. You could be leaving a trail of morels. Another good reason not to carry a basket for morels, a story: I was going morel hunting. Mary Wakino and Janet Sutter were with me I think. On the map I found some orchard spot in Rockland County. We were climbing up the hillside to the orchard. I saw someone coming down



Cottonwood



Red Pine

with a basket of morels. I thought, "Too bad. But, *now* I know where the morels are." That's the moral of that story. Every year after that I got there first. Who was that man coming down the hill? Jasper Johns. So, don't carry a basket.

Another important point with morels is that they need to be fully cooked. If people don't cook them well, they can get very sick. I think they taste better when they're cooked longer. I cook dried morels. I think they taste better. The texture is better.

DA: Now you know everything except my best spots, and the sad thing is that I don't have best spots anymore. There are areas where the elm tree has been wiped out—places in northwestern New Jersey, the best area around, there are no more elms. Central and southern Vermont, the elm is a tree of the past. But the good news is that there are still living elms, in and to the north of New York City. You want to look for elms that still have their bark, with little or no leaves. Once the bark is off you rarely find morels in any number. 🍄

*Sadowsky, cont. from p. 5*

and you come upon this bicycle-shaped mushroom growing on the elm wood, you will not likely find any morels nearby. The elm wood is too far gone. The cap surface of this poypore is covered in brownish scales, and the pores are angular, whitish to yellow in color. When cut, the flesh smells like watermelon rind and will serve a purpose in your kitchen as a nice addition to the stockpot. [Editor's note: Check out this issue's recipes for *P. squamosus* ideas from member Elinoar Shavit.]

Gary Lincoff's *Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Mushrooms* has descriptions and illustrations for all of these mushrooms. One should consult his book and others to come to a more complete understanding of these mushrooms, their habitats and their look-alikes. 🍄



White Pine



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