

It's Morel Mushroom Season In The Riverbend

April 17 2017 8:34 AM



ALTON - Every year for a span of four to six weeks, small expressions of fungus litter the forest floors around the Riverbend.



Those little beings are known as morel mushrooms, and they are considered a delicacy by many. Mushroom hunters go to special spots near creeks, in woods, and sometimes even by the roadside. According to the lore of the most experienced hunters, the art of mushroom hunting is knowing where to go. They say it's all about the trees. Find an area with the right species of trees, they say, and the mushroom harvest will be plentiful.

Marshall Ingrassia, a recent transplant to Alton from Granite City, said he has been hunting morel mushrooms for as long as five years. He said the "pickins" across the area have been pretty good this year but expects this coming weekend to be the "prime" of mushroom season. He wanted to share some of his tips with potential hunters before they go exploring.

"First, study the difference between a false morel and a true morel," he said.

False morels, which some people insist are safe to consume, contain a toxin called "monomethyl hydrazine" (MMH), which is also found in rocket fuel and can cause dizziness, vomiting, and even death. Some deaths have been reported from ingesting false morels, but they are rare.

According to a [website for mushroom appreciation](#), morels can be identified by the cap and the interior. Morels have a uniform ridged cap, which is pitted inwards. Caps and stems will be attached, not hanging free. Once the cap has been examined, the mushroom may be split asunder. If it is hollow from tail to snout, then it is likely a morel. If it is not, the mushroom should not be consumed.

"Good places to look are around elm and ash trees, especially where the ground is moist and the dirt is loose," Ingrassia said. "Study your 'shrooms, and enjoy the pickin!"

Also, people hunting mushrooms must ask for permission before venturing onto private land. Some public areas can be used as mushroom hunting spots, and others cannot. It is important to ensure permission for mushroom hunting has been granted by the property owners or managers to avoid arrest and possible harm.