

50 Tips to put **more MORELS** in your basket

By Mike Krebill, Board Member, Prairie States Mushroom Club

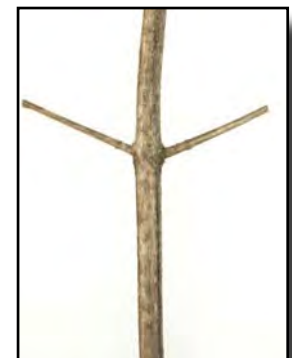
1. Post morel photos around the house before the season begins.
2. Repeatedly study the pattern of pits and ridges in a photo of morels. Look for that pockmarked natural sponge pattern when hunting. It will distinguish morels from their background if you search for it.
3. Build confidence with affirmations.
4. Learn to recognize tree associates.
5. Find promising spots before morels appear. Obtain permission.
6. Buy an instant read thermometer to check soil temperatures. Begin looking for morels when daytime air temperatures reach the 60s, nighttime temperatures are in the 50s, & the soil temperature is 53° F.
7. Start hunting in the south & follow morels north with the spring. Track the progression of morels from Mexico to Canada at http://morelmushroomhunting.com/morel_progression_sightings_map.htm and http://www.morelmushroomhunting.net/report/current/mmhc_report_page1.html. (You don't have to pay to look.)
8. Register and log in to <http://www.morels.com/forums/>. Click on Message Boards and go to the forum for your state. You'll get feedback on when and where morels start being found and the relative degree of success.
9. As a general rule in Iowa, start looking in early April. Hunt through the third week of May.
10. Get there first!
11. Never divulge the places where you find morels.
12. Hunt when dandelions are blooming.
13. Hunt after warm spring rains.
14. Once you see a morel, look for more before picking it.
15. Mid-season morels are frequently found in clusters. Search the area thoroughly after a find and carefully move ground cover and plants that might be hiding more before moving on.
16. Map productive locations and return the following season. According to his website, (www.mushroomgear.com), morel hunting champion Alex Babich and his wife Nannette have 700 secret sites scattered over 12 states. They follow the morels north from North Carolina and Tennessee each year, averaging about 200 pounds annually.
17. Look beneath elms that are dying or have died within the last year. Most of the bark will be on the tree, but sections of it will be loose.
18. Oak trees rank second in Iowa after elms as a place to find morels.
19. Morels have been found in white pine and Norway spruce plantations.
20. Old apple orchards are another great place to hunt.
21. Don't overlook black locust groves.
22. Look around older ash trees. Their bark has interlacing ridges that form elongated diamond shapes. The limbs have opposite branching.



Elm roots



Ash tree bark and branching pattern



23. Morels have been found near aspen groves, wild black cherry trees, shagbark hickory, in river and stream bottoms with cottonwood and silver maple and sycamore, near wild grape vines and beneath Osage orange trees. In fact, morels are known to be mycorrhizal partners with 22 species of trees found in the Midwest. In the West, morels form mycorrhizal structures with ponderosa pine, douglas fir, western larch, and lodgepole pine.*
24. They have been found along fencerows, well away from trees, in lawns, and even in prairies. Stay in search mode when outdoors.
25. When times are dry, head downhill. Search the base of slopes.
26. If practical, hook up a sprinkler in your woods. Just don't let your neighbors know what you are doing!
27. Check mossy ground. Moss holds water, but it also makes morels easier to see.
28. Thoroughly investigate areas with heavy to moderate ground cover, using a hiking stick to lift screening vegetation or move leafy plants to one side.
29. Use a hiking stick to gently open up raised clumps of leaves, as morels may be pushing them up.
30. Use a hiking stick to flip over large pieces of elm bark that have fallen on the ground.
31. Early in the season, forage ridge tops, creek, and river bottoms with sandy soil, seeking areas where sunlight hits and warms the soil.
32. Check the edges of woods and fields and look around stumps where the sun can warm the soil.
33. Early in the season, when the ground is still warming up, concentrate on searching south-facing slopes.
34. Later in the season, as south-facing slopes dry out and get overgrown with vegetation, hunt north-facing slopes.
35. Hunt islands.
36. If an area floods, it takes two to three years before morels can recover, so don't waste time searching recently flooded areas.
37. Don't count on your peripheral vision to spot morels. Foveal vision, where the view of both eyes overlaps, is the sharpest, most focused, highest resolution part of our gaze. You will identify more morels if you concentrate on slowly sweeping for them using your foveal vision. (Tip from Garrett Todd.)
38. Garrett Todd also believes the time spent looking is far more important than the distance covered. For every minute of walking, spend six minutes looking.
39. If you are not seeing any mushrooms, change locations.
40. Look 10 to 20 feet away, not directly down. Morels can blend right in against the leaves on the ground if you are looking down at them. It helps to see them standing up above the forest floor.
41. Get a lower perspective in order to see the mushrooms sticking up above the ground. Squat or kneel down, or try the Groucho Marx duck walk.
42. Bring children or grandchildren with you when you hunt. Being closer to the ground, they may add many to your harvest once you help them find the first morel.
43. A dog's sense of smell is 200,000 times greater than a human's. Dogs can be trained to find morels. You can hire someone to train your dog to locate morels for \$6,000, or do it yourself. Go to this link to find out how to do it yourself: <http://www.shroomery.org/forums/showflat.php/Number/10247655>
44. Buy books on morels to get tips from authors. Here's some I own:
- a. Larry Lonik. *Morels: True or False. The Essential Field Guide and More*. RKT Publishing, Hazel Park, MI. 1999.
 - b. Chris Matherly. *Morel Mushroom Hunting Secrets*. www.morelmushroomhunting.com. 2010.
 - c. John and Theresa Maybrier. *Morel Hunting*. Stackpole Books, Mechanicsburg, PA. 2010.
 - d. Milan Pelouch. *How to Find Morels Even As Others Are Coming Back Empty-Handed*. The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor. 2008.
 - e. Michael E. Phillips. *Morel Mushrooms: Best-Kept Secrets Revealed*. Thunder Bay Press, Holt, MI. 2011.
 - f. Nancy Smith Weber. *A Morel Hunter's Companion: A Guide to the True and False Morels of Michigan*. Thunder Bay Press, Lansing, MI. 1995.

45. Watch video clips and DVDs on morel hunting. Warning: occasionally the clips posted on YouTube will try your patience as the person – eager to show you morels – is totally unaware of how hard he is making it to watch the recorded footage. The camcorder bounces up and down when he walks, then jerks back and forth as he tries to search for morels through the viewfinder. Dizzying! Some are very low resolution, suitable perhaps for viewing on a computer, but absolutely awful on a modern HD TV. Others are nicely produced and can be very instructive. Not long ago, I ordered the *Morel Mushroom Hunting* double-DVD set from National Morel Mushroom Hunting Champion Alex Babich. It promised over two hours of morel-hunting secrets, favorite recipes, motherlode finds, and more. Alex, his wife Nana, and even their young daughter make it look easy. (Their web site is www.mushroomgear.com.)

46. Areas burned by fires often have large fruitings of morels.

47. Since there are many variables that influence morel fruiting, keep a journal. Record the date of your hunt, the weather, the place you hunted and if it was great, so-so, or bad. Note how many you found, with advice to yourself for next season. Briefly describe the vegetation and soils.

48. Clay soils tend to stay cold and wet. When there's a drought, they can become as hard as a rock. Perhaps for those reasons, at least one author has given them a thumbs-down.

49. If you find morels near a tree, there may well be more as far out as the canopy extends, so take a little time to scope it out.

50. As ash trees become weakened by the Emerald Ash Borer, there will be a temporary increase in morel populations around infected trees. When the tree dies and loses its bark, however, morels will vanish in that spot.



All photos by Mike Krebill

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Editorial Committee: **It is important to point out to readers that published studies on the potential for morels to be mycorrhizal have shown only that some species can associate with the roots of various species of plant, in some cases forming mycorrhiza-like structures with those roots. However, the existence of a structure is not sufficient to prove that a mycorrhizal relationship exists. To our knowledge, there are no published reports of studies that have demonstrated the required physiological relationship between the presumed partners. Therefore, we feel it is premature to conclude that morels exhibit a mycorrhizal relationship with trees.*