



Morel Booster™

Morel Mushroom News From Morel Mania, Inc.

Editor: Tom Nauman Issue No. 22 ♦ March 2014

Sponsored By:

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Predictions for the Season

Moreldom is abuzz with talk of a super 2014 morel season. I've mentioned before that I usually don't get involved pondering how good (or bad) an upcoming season may be. The reason is because I can't do anything about it anyway. We are all at the mercy of Mother Nature and Father Time. Speaking of time, there's also a lot of discussion about how soon the season will start. The first morel in the mid-continent was found in Georgia on March 9 of 2014. In 2013, it was found on March 1.

One might assume from this that the season will be a week later than last year. That might be true for Georgia. But, in Central Illinois, the 2013 season didn't start until May 1. In my opinion, we can't get much later than that. Our rule of thumb is that generally the season starts around April 15 (tax day to mid-May).

I also don't usually get involved in pondering when the season will start. Mother Nature will get around to making conditions right when she is good and ready. I used to be out in the woods several weeks ahead of the season. I was actually the morel welcoming committee. And, as the season did approach, I probably trampled hundreds of baby morels that weren't big enough to break through the leaves or moss yet. I guess that I've learned patience with age as I no longer feel the need to be there to greet them. And when I do find the first one, I generally leave it be to honor the memory of a departed mushroom hunting buddy.

So, for those who want to know when to start looking, check the soil temp maps. A good one is hosted by the Illinois Farm Bureau at:

<http://dtn.ilfb.org/index.cfm?show=1&mapID=20&showMenu=0>

It shows the daily ground temperature at 4" below the surface for the entire country. When the temperatures get to the 50 to 55 degree range, the morels are starting. But, they're probably going to be less than a half-inch tall, and you may trample more than you find. Other indicators are when you see the first anthills in the yard or the first dandelions in the yard. The dandelions near a building don't count because the ground there is super heated and will produce dandelions several days before those appearing in the middle of the yard. For the most part, my indicators are for the small gray morels (*morchella exculenta* and *morchella delisciosa*). The black and half-free morels may be ahead of that schedule.

If you'd rather wait until you don't have to squint to see them, keep an eye on the lilac bushes. When they are just ready to bloom, some of the morels will be getting some size to them and it won't take many to make a meal. You may also watch our Sightings page at:

<http://www.morelmania.com/6Sightings/2014sightings.html>

We sort the reports we get by state and date. And, once you know the season travels north at the rate of 100 miles per week, you can estimate your season's timing by paying attention to what's happening south of you. You must also remember that there are other variables - particularly moisture. If the area south of you got rain last week and you're not getting any, or haven't gotten any, your timing will be different.

Alex Babich of mushroomgear.com is predicting a late season. He's not saying how late, but his logic is good. For those that don't know Alex, he is a true morel maniac. A mushroom huntin' fool best describes him. That title is a compliment, by the way. He regularly hunts at least eight states every year. His goal this year is to

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gather 1,000 pounds of morels in the Midwest. He's also an angler, including ice fishing. So he keeps an eye on how long the ice remains on the lakes. He noticed it's much later this year and based on criteria from years gone by, the morel season will arrive later than usual.

Back to the original topic of how many morels are going to make an appearance. All I'm hearing is snow, snow, snow. I guess it's because we got so much of it that snow is all we can think about. The summation of discussions is that all the snow will saturate the ground and give the morels an abundance of moisture to make them grow in massive herds.

Well, the snow will certainly help saturate the ground with moisture, provided it melts slowly. However, the Illinois River and others are already in flood stage in March because the snow is melting and it can't soak in because the ground is still frozen.

Here's my prediction. 2014 will be a tremendous year, provided we get an average amount of rainfall from the first week of April through the middle of May (earlier to the south and later for the North). We're going to see bumper crops. Most people will say it's because of the record amount of snow. I disagree.

Some of you may not be old enough to remember the winter and spring of 1979. But, I bet you've heard 1979 mentioned in conversations about the weather recently. It was the last time we had such extreme cold (and snow). Everyone is comparing the winter of 2014 to it. I heard one weather report say that in the first two months of 2014 we had 23 days when the temperature dropped below zero. Most of us really noticed it in our utility bills. I'm not sure I believe it, but one plumber I talked to said the frost was five feet deep.

I'm old enough to remember 1979 for the extreme weather. I also remember it for being one of the best morel seasons ever. Some of the dutch elm disease years of the late 1960's and early 1970's may have been better, but I hadn't committed them to memory like I did 1979.

My logic is this, the extreme cold caused the ground to freeze extra deep and extra cold. One or two things resulted. The mycelium (organism the the morel fruits from) became stressed (physically threatened) and reacted by producing more morels for propagation of the species (survival). And/or, the freeze stressed the host (elm tree, ash tree, tulip poplar tree, etc.) the mycelium is co-existing with so that the mycelium sensed a change in the nutrition it receives from the host (nutritional stress). And again, the mycelium reacted by sending out the fruit (morel) so that it will produce spores, so the spores can float through the air until they land somewhere conducive to their growing into new mycelium and start the cycle all over again.

In conclusion, Mother Nature has the "perfect storm" prepared for the 2014 morel season. All we need now is for a storm or two to grace us with an inch or two of rain every two or three days and we'll all be extremely happy. Good Luck!

There's a new law in Michigan: Landowners can recover \$750 or property damages from people who trespass to hunt or engage in other recreational activity.



\$500 Cash

**For the Largest Morel Found
During the Midwest Morel Fest!
\$950 Total Purse.**

"We are glad to be teaming up with partners old and new" said Ottawa's Mayor Robert Eschbach of the 4th Annual Midwest Morel Fest. "Again we will highlight our Morel University on Friday Night, May 2nd for the novice hunter. Participants will attend a half hour class then be bussed to a hunt site with guides to help them identify what they have just learned. It's a great evening for families and groups. Saturday's schedule also has something to offer everyone."

New to the event this year will be the **Marseilles Area Society of Homebrewers (MASH)** along with other Midwest Brewing Clubs who will bring their handcrafted beer for a tasting from 10am -4pm. Beer will be judged and each club awarded one "Mayor's Choice" award followed by the Mayor's "Best in Show" selection. In addition, the public will be able to vote for "Best Overall Club" who will be awarded the Brewers Cup announced during the Championship Awards Ceremony at 3pm when the "**Largest Mushroom**" trophy will carry a **\$500 cash prize**. "We believe these additions to the fest will definitely enhance the experience along with our mushroom hunting activities, vendor booths and the morel auction starting at 1pm".

We will also welcome **Anna Blessing**, Author of *Locally Brewed*. Sponsored by **The Book Mouse**, she will be featured in a walk through educational tasting experience on Saturday, May 3rd starting at 10am. Copies of her new book will be available in the tent and the **Book Mouse** throughout the day.

Her new book *Locally Brewed: Portraits of Craft Breweries*

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from America's Heartland. Locally Brewed celebrated the Midwest's craft brewing movement with profiles of 20 of the area's brew masters and their breweries. The stories are entertaining and inspiring stories of the individuals who have been essential in the exponential growth of this movement, as told through vivid interviews, beautiful photography, and dynamic artwork. Ms. Blessing will be available to talk about and sign copies of her book after the judging is complete. **The Book Mouse** will have this book and her book, *Locally Grown: Portraits of Artisanal Farms from America's Heartland* available for purchase at the event.

"We are also happy to welcome **The Conservation Foundation** as one of our partners. They have the expertise to recommend sites that would best yield morels for the hunts" said Eschbach. "Working with them on other projects has made this a natural fit for their organization".

View and/or print the complete brochure/schedule for the 2014 Midwest Morel Fest at

<http://www.experienceottawa.com/documents/onlinepamphlet2014.pdf>

2014 Morel Festivals

Mountain Mushroom Festival

April 26 & 27

Irvine, KY

mountainmushroomfestival.org

Midwest Morel Fest

May 2 & 3

Ottawa, Illinois

experienceottawa.com

Mansfield Mushroom Festival

April 26 & 27

Mansfield, Indiana

mansfieldvillage.com

Iowa Morel Fest

May 9 - 11

McGregor, Iowa

facebook.com/IowaMorelMasters

Simply Music Simply Mushrooms Morel Festival

April 25 - 27

Bill Monroe Bluegrass Hall of Fame & Campgrounds

Brown County, Indiana

morelfestival.com

National Morel Mushroom Festival

May 15-18

Boyer City, Michigan

morelfest.com

**Other Morel Festivals
will be listed next month.**

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