

Alaska Burn Morels



True Morels

Most morels in Alaska grow in recently burned areas, with the greatest abundance typically found in the springtime, 1-3 years after a fire.

Harvesting morels in recently burned areas can be hazardous. **Be aware of unstable trees, ash pits with active embers, and slippery soils.** It's easy to get lost in burn areas, so carry a GPS or compass. Bears are active and hungry in the spring: make noise and carry deterrents. **Be Bear Aware.**

Morels resemble other closely related species frequently found in similar habitats. These run the gamut from choice to deadly poisonous, so learning to identify true morels from "false" morels is critical. Any

edible in this group should always be well-cooked. Raw and undercooked specimens are responsible for a large number of poisonings each year.

True Morels (*Morchella* spp.) can vary in color. Typically those found in burn areas are dark brown, gray, or black. They have conic to rounded caps with a network of ridges and pits, are completely hollow, and a cap that is attached along its entire length to the stem. Morels are considered choice edibles **Some people cannot tolerate morels even when well-cooked.**

Early False Morel (*Verpa bohemica*) can be very common in the spring, especially among alder and cottonwood. Its cap is bell-shaped, brown and wrinkled, and is only attached at the top of the stem. The stem is thick and white, and stuffed with fine cottony threads. **Although commonly collected, this mushroom can cause gastric upset.**



Early False Morel



Spring False Morels

Spring False Morels (*Gyromitra esculenta*) are frequently found in burn and natural areas when true morels are also out. The caps of this false morel are irregular to slightly lobed or saddle shaped with a brain like surface that varies from dull red to reddish brown or darker brown. The interior is folded, with one or more chambers. **This mushroom can cause serious illness and death.**

Find out more about harvesting morels

The Alaska Interagency Coordination Center (fire.ak.blm.gov) has updated fire information including fire history maps. The University of Alaska Fairbanks Cooperative Extension Service (cespubs.uaf.edu) has a useful publication about morels.

Be aware of land ownership as rules with regards to personal or commercial morel harvesting varies by land owner or land management agency.

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