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Perkins, OK (PRWEB) April 21, 2004 -- Morels are found in the spring in late April and May, when redbuds, dogwoods, and certain fruit trees bloom. The mushrooms appear about a week after the first good rain. The morel, *Morchella esculenta*, is of the best-tasting, most popular mushrooms collected from the wild. It is the easiest wild mushroom to identify, even for a beginner. .... ?In springtime when the redbud blooms, the woods are full of wild mushrooms,? says ?Mushroom Lady? Sondra Detreau Williams of Lost Creek Mushroom Farm. Williams is referring to the morel mushroom, *Morchella esculenta*, one of the best-tasting, most popular mushrooms collected from the wild. It is the easiest wild mushroom to identify, even for a beginner.

Morels are cone-shaped, like Christmas trees. They look like a brain or a sponge, with ridges and pits. The caps may be tan, brown, ivory or a tawny yellow color. When cut open, both the cap and the stem are hollow inside. The hollow cap and stem are the best way to identify edible morels from false morels, which are segmented or chambered inside. False morels generally appear in the summer and fall.

Wild morels appear late April to mid-May after the redbuds, dogwoods, and certain fruit trees bloom. The mushrooms appear about a week after the first good rain following the blooming.

The ?signal tree? is specific for each area of the country. The Mushroom Lady suggests contacting county agricultural extension agents or local farmers and mushroom hunters for the type of local tree and the time the morels are out. ?The early morels grow in low areas after the first rains,? according to shiitake mushroom farmer and morel hunter Doug Williams, also of Lost Creek Mushroom Farm and Redbud Gourmet. ?As more warm rains fall, they?ll be growing higher up.?

There are no hard and fast rules about where to find morels, and successful hunters usually keep their hunting grounds a carefully guarded secret.

Morels can grow anywhere. They seem to like elms, dead elm roots, apple trees, Jerusalem artichokes, and fence rows. They can be found at the edges of woods, in open woods and in yards and fields. One type seems to prefer burned-over ground.

?Morels have reproductive cycles that can last ten to twelve years,? Williams said, ?so they can grow in a place for several years, then not appear there again for years.?

## Time to Hunt Wild Morel Mushrooms

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Morels are fragile and don't keep well, so they are rarely available as fresh mushrooms. Most dried morels are sold by the fraction of an ounce and can cost \$10 an ounce and up. "You can dry them or freeze them," Williams explained, "but we eat all the ones we find."

Williams warned, "Some people have a violent reaction to the combination of alcohol and morels and should not drink alcohol during or after eating the mushrooms."

To prepare morels, Williams cuts them in half and either brushes them with a soft brush or soaks them in salt water to get rid of any small insects inside the mushrooms. The morels can be sauteed in butter with salt and pepper or dipped in seasoned flour or in egg and flour and fried in butter. The Mushroom Lady likes a cream of morel mushroom soup made with Madiera wine, but Williams' favorite is butterscotch morels.

"I heat together equal amounts of butter and brown sugar, until the sugar is melted. Then I cook the morels in it until they're tender. Sometimes I add a little garlic powder. They're just wonderful."

For free mushroom recipes, including morels, portobellos and shiitakes, send a stamped, self-addressed #10 envelope to Morel Season Recipes, Lost Creek Mushroom Farm, PO Box 520, Perkins, OK 74075.

For shiitake recipes and information about growing mushrooms, visit [www.shiitakemushroom.org.com](http://www.shiitakemushroom.org.com) or call 1-800-792-0053 for a free brochure.