



# Western Pennsylvania Mushroom Club Newsletter April/May 2009



Volume 10,  
Issue 1  
April/May 2009

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The newsletter of the Western Pennsylvania Mushroom Club is published and distributed 5 times per year: April/May, June/July, Aug/Sept, Oct/Nov, and Dec. Articles, photos, news items, and other submissions should be sent to the editor at least 6-8 weeks prior to targeted distribution for the best chance of inclusion. The editor cannot guarantee that submissions will be included in the next newsletter. The editor reserves the right to make spelling or grammatical corrections and may suggest content changes to the author. Material published in our newsletters may be used in other non-profit publications only with expressed permission and with appropriate acknowledgements.

### Club Officers

*President*  
John Stuart

*Vice President*  
Jim Wilson

## President's Corner

Welcome back to the start of a fresh new season. We have some great new programs in store for 2009 as well as old favorites like Morel Madness Weekend at Mingo Park May 2 and 3, our popular cultivation program with free kits on May 19, a chanterelle walk and pot luck picnic that we will share with Venture Outdoors on July 18 in North Park, and Gary Lincoff plus several other top notch speakers who will appear at the Lincoff Mid-Atlantic foray on Sept 12.

The new programs include covering the key features of a group of mushrooms that are brought in year after year at the Lincoff foray. There are 35 species that were consistently found in at least 6 out of 7 years. These mushrooms will be presented in groups of 5 over the course of our monthly meetings starting in March so that by the end of August each of the 35 species will be well known by everyone. At the end of the program we hope to produce a CD that will consolidate all the presentations on one disc in case you could not attend every meeting.

Another new program is an advanced course on Polypores that will be given on May 9, 2009 from 1 to 4 pm at Harrison Hills Park Environmental Learning Center. Polypores are a ubiquitous group of fungi that can easily be found year round

and are nature's wood recyclers par excellence. We will be covering 30 of our most common species – how to identify them, where they are found, which are edible, and how they contribute to the ecosystem. They have been known for thousands of years and were found in the leather pouch of the 5300 year old Ice Man. One species has been used traditionally in the Orient for over 2000 years to "slow aging, promote a youthful healthy glow, fight intellectual decline, sharpen concentration and build will power". You will learn all about this mushroom of immortality and how to make the tea that will do all this for you. (Sorry, no money back guarantees). We will also be offering an "Introduction to Mushrooms" course for beginners who want a concentrated program covering the basics of mushroom anatomy, identification, classification, poisonous species to avoid, and which are the good edibles. This course is also on May 9 at Harrison Hills from 9 to 12.

So if you haven't already signed up for 2009 do it now. This will insure that you keep receiving our newsletter which is now under the direction of our new co-editors Rebecca Miller and Terry Finnegan. They are off to a good start, and we wish them well.

John Stuart -- President, WPMC

### Lead A Walk

If you know of a good site for a mushroom hunting walk please communicate with a club officer. We are always looking for new sites. Woodsy areas of any size might be the habitat for interesting and beautiful fungi. If you know of a likely site but are new to mushroom hunting, we can always pair you up with a more advanced mushroom identifier to help lead your walk. If you are new to the club and have not yet participated in a foray, don't be shy! The average walk is attended by only six to twenty members so it's a great opportunity to meet fellow woods lovers and you don't have to fear that too large of a group might tromple all over your favorite bit of woods.

We will be presenting an Intro to Mushroom Course and walk on June 6 for the **Phipps Conservatory**. They are charging a fee. The course is open to the general public, although Phipps members get a reduced rate. To register for this course call Sarah at 412-441-4442 Ext.3925.

**Venture Outdoors.** The club will be hosting a 2 hour mushroom walk July 18, 2009 at 10am followed by a pot luck picnic. Meet at the Deer Browse II shelter in North Park adjacent to the swimming pool parking lot. We will be concentrating on the chanterelle, an excellent edible. If you want a good introduction to wild mushroom hunting, we invite you to participate in this event. Walk leaders will be Jack and Valerie Baker.

### Mushroom Identification Courses

The Western Pennsylvania Mushroom Club will be presenting an "Introduction to Wild Mushrooms" course at Harrison Hills Nature Center on Saturday, May 9, 2009 from 9am to 12. The course will cover a lot of interesting information on mushrooms, their role in the ecosystem, Lincoff's 12 mushroom groups, basic collecting tips, mushroom toxicity, poisonous mushrooms to avoid, some of the best edibles, and rules to follow to keep you out of trouble. Cost of the course is \$5 to be collected at the door. To register for the course please contact; Patrick Kopnick at 724-224-4102.

The Western Pennsylvania Mushroom Club will be presenting an advanced course on "Polypores" at Harrison Hills Nature Center on Saturday, May 9, 2009 from 1pm to 4pm. Polypores are a ubiquitous group of mushrooms that can be found year round. We will go over their role as nature's wood recyclers par excellence and cover how to identify over 30 of the most common species found in our area. Cost of the course is \$10 to be collected at the door. To register for the course please; contact Patrick Kopnick at 724-224-4102 .

### Morel Madness

This year Morel Madness will again take place at Mingo Creek Park in Washington County. Plan to attend on the weekend of May 2-3. Attendees must pre-register by calling the Washington County Parks office at 724-228-6867. See Page 6.

### Monthly Meetings

Our meetings are held on the third Tuesday of each month from March until November. They begin at 7:00PM at Beechwood Nature Reserve in Dorseyville. Please see their website ([www.aswp.org](http://www.aswp.org)) for directions and other information.

**March 17<sup>th</sup>** "Carnivorous and Cannibalistic Fungi" by John Plischke III. Most people view mushrooms as relatively passive organisms which quietly go about their work composting organic material in the environment. John Plischke III, a club mycologist, will discuss another group of fungi that grow on (i.e. attack?) other mushrooms, people, plants, insects, etc. Their outward appearance often doesn't give hints of their aggressive behavior.

**April 21<sup>st</sup>** "Morel Hunting Basics" by Mike Lloyd. Spring is the time of year to hunt for morel mushrooms. These very delectable treasures are surprisingly difficult to find. Mike Lloyd will cover the basics of what all mushroom hunters need to know to be successful in filling their baskets. Mike's talks are always very entertaining.

**May 19<sup>th</sup>** "Mushrooms Cultivation" by Mark Spear, Rebecca Miller, John Plischke III, and Jim Tunney. The Mushroom Club's Cultivation Team will discuss growing mushrooms at home from a number of different perspectives. With their guidance, amateur growers can learn how to grow several different mushrooms quite easily and effectively. In the past, oyster mushroom growing kits have been given to members, and logs were inoculated for growing shiitake mushrooms. Come to this meeting to see what new possibilities the team has developed.

**June 16<sup>th</sup>** "Why Do Mushroom Names Change?"

by La Monte Yarroll. After a brief introduction to taxonomy (the scientific naming of organisms), La Monte Yarroll, a club mycologist, will discuss examples of scientific names that have changed, who changed them, and why they were changed. He will also show why people who just want to eat mushrooms should care about taxonomy.

**July 21<sup>st</sup>** "Craft Workshop" by Joyce Gross and the craft committee. The craft group in our club has presented many creative uses for wild mushrooms besides eating and scientific study. Come to this meeting to see what they have dreamed up. This is a great meeting for kids of all ages.

**August 18<sup>th</sup>** "How Many Mushrooms Do You Know?" by Dick Dougall. Many beginners and even experienced mushroomers don't think they can identify many mushrooms. Dick will demonstrate that most club members are familiar with more mushrooms than they think, even including their scientific names. Approaches will be demonstrated that will help everyone add new mushrooms to those they know well.

### Lincoff Foray

The 7th annual **Gary Lincoff Mid-Atlantic Mushroom Foray** is scheduled for **September 12, 2009**. Gary Lincoff will be our Principal Mycologist. John Plischke is in the process of recruiting several other outstanding mycologists. We will have more information about their afternoon talks in future issues of the Newsletter,

Last year, our club cooks came up with their usual mushroom feast. It featured 37 great dishes from dips, soups, appetizers, main dishes, and even desserts. Nobody went home hungry! Most people are unaware that mushrooms can be used in so many ways. Our cooks are always happy to talk recipes with the foray attendees.

As always, we will have morning and afternoon walks in North Park and other neighboring sites. Last year, these walks produced only 107 different species of mushrooms due to extremely dry conditions. We anticipate that over 150 mushroom species will be displayed on our identification tables. This is a great way to see actual specimens of mushrooms you want to learn to identify. Many are wonderful edibles, and you can also learn to recognize the poisonous mushrooms to avoid!

Early registration is still only \$25 per person (\$50 at door). Student price is \$10, children under 11 are \$5. This is a real bargain; the mushroom feast alone is worth the cost. Mark your calendars and get your registration in early for this all-day mushroom experience.

### Be All You Can Be

Rebecca Miller

Everyone in the club is invited and encouraged to participate. You might lead a walk, give a presentation at one of the meetings, or write something for the newsletter.

Presentations at the meetings can be of any length; often two members speak. My first experience speaking in front of the club was a real break from my usual introverted behavior. I had prepared a 10 minute talk along with a few slides. I knew that even if my talk did not hold the attention of the group they were not likely to pelt me with rotten mushrooms. Still, as we drove to the meeting I thought "the other speaker will have to carry on, I'm not doing this". Being a member for about a year I still knew only a couple of people in the club, and my inherent shyness was overwhelming me. At the last moment I took a deep breath and got up to the podium. The 10 minutes flew by, and my first presentation was history. The advantage of giving a presentation became obvious at the next meeting. Suddenly everyone recognized me and greeted me by name. Standing at that podium was like giving a personal introduction of myself to everyone else and it became easy for others to approach me. The following meetings became all the more enjoyable as I was no longer a stranger but among a group of friends.

If you have an idea for a presentation but are not sure how to proceed, just speak to me or any club officer. We would be happy to help you put something together or perhaps pair you up with a co-speaker.

Writing for the newsletter is another opportunity to participate in the club. Articles of any length are welcome. Everyone would enjoy reading about your experiences in the woods or other aspects of mushroom study. Some discussions that occur on the club's Yahoo group could be written up. Recipes, poems, and jokes will all find a place in the newsletter. Is there a budding cartoonist among our members? Submissions may be sent by mail or email, or give me a call on the telephone. Contact information is on the back of this newsletter.

If part of your reason for joining the club was to meet people with common interests you can really speed up the process by participating. I look forward to meeting you.

## Western Pennsylvania Mushroom Club—Walks and Forays

We request that no one hunts a walk or foray location for at least two weeks prior to a walk or foray. It is only through your cooperation that we can have successful walks and forays. All walks & forays will be held rain or shine. Come 15-30 min early and socialize. All walks start on time, so be early; if you are late, we will already be in the woods. You can find last minute additions or changes by going to our Yahoo Groups at [groups.yahoo.com/group/wpamushroomclub](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/wpamushroomclub)

April 18 – 10:00-12:00 Hampton Township Park, Allegheny County. Meet Dick Dougall and Dick Duffy at the swimming pool parking lot. From Route 8, turn onto Wildwood Road Extension (not toward North Park). Then turn right onto School Road to Hampton Middle School. Go past the school to the end of the parking lot where the road makes a hard left. Turn left into park at sign to Tennis Courts, just across from Hampton High School. Turn left at another sign to the Tennis Courts. Turn right at the stop sign to the swimming pool. We will walk part of the Rachel Carson Trail.

April 25 – 10:00-12:00 Keystone State Park, Westmoreland County. Meet Jim Tunney at the James Kell Visitor's Center. From Rt. 22, New Alexandria, turn onto 981 south at the traffic light. Go south for 2.8 miles (ignore the first park sign you see). Turn left onto Slag Road. Go .8 miles and turn right at the park's contact station. Follow this road for .6 miles and turn right at the James A. Kell Visitor center sign.

May 2-3 – 11:00 am Morel Mushroom Madness Weekend, Mingo Creek, Washington County. Meet John Plischke and John Plischke III. Registration 11 am, program at 12:00 sharp. This is the biggest morel slide show and hunt in the eastern US. There will be an evening program on Edible Wild Mushrooms & How to Prepare Them. Sunday morning we will hunt morels. Camping will be available for \$5. I 70 to Exit 9 Eighty Four/Glyde. Take Rt. 519 N for 2 miles. At a red light turn right onto Rt. 136. Go 4.4 miles and turn left at a sign to Mingo Creek Park. Follow signs to the park. Check in roadside near Henry House. TO PRE-REGISTER WITH THE PARK. CALL 724-228-6867. We found morels at this program last year. <http://www.washpatourism.org/parks.html> The program is free to members, but you must show a current membership card.

May 3 – 10:00 am Meet the West Virginia Mushroom Club for their first foray at Stuart Recreation Area, Elkins, WV. The foray fee of \$10 per person or \$15 per family includes lunch. Bill Roody, author of *Mushrooms of West Virginia and the Central Appalachians* will be our guide and taxonomist. Contact Shelly Conrad at [geezere@aol.com](mailto:geezere@aol.com) for more information.

May 16 - 10:00-12:00, Deer Lakes Park, Allegheny County, Russelton. Meet Jim Wilson and Dick Dougall. From the PA Turnpike get off at the Allegheny Valley Exit 5. Turn toward New Kensington. Turn left onto Route 28. Follow to Pearl Avenue; and turn left. Continue on Pearl Ave, it becomes Russelton Road. In Russelton, turn right at the first intersection, look for a drug store, bank and liquor store and turn right. In a short distance you will see a Deer Lakes Park sign, turn left into the park. Just past the first lake, there is a large parking lot, meet there.

May 23 -- 10:00-12:00, Return to Mingo Creek, Washington County. Meet John Plischke III and Kim Plischke. I 70 to Exit 9 Eighty Four/Glyde. Take Rt. 519 N for 2 miles. At a red light turn right onto Rt. 136. Go 4.4 miles and turn left at a sign to Mingo Creek Park. Follow signs to the park.

Turn right then cross a covered bridge that's just before the Park Office. Meet at Shelter 4.

May 29 – 10:00 – 2:00 Eden Hall Farm Campus of Chatham University, Allegheny County. Meet Sandy Sterner and John Plischke III. Follow Route 8 North toward Butler. Take the Bakerstown Road/Red Belt Exit adjacent to Bakerstown Feed & Garden Center (Heckert Road). At first stop sign, turn left onto the Red Belt/Bakerstown Road. Follow the Red Belt to Ridge Road and turn right. Eden Hall Farm Campus is ½ mile ahead on your left. Meet in the parking lot closest to the entrance.

Sept 12 – Gary Lincoff Mid Atlantic Mushroom Foray Don't miss it, register today!

For all walks and forays, bring water and lunch. Dress for the weather. Bring basket, wax or paper bags (no plastic) to keep mushrooms separated, whistle, compass, chair, hand lens, insect repellent, cell phone, and books for identification. Also bring a knife to dig up mushrooms for identification or to cut edibles off to keep them clean. Try to dig up 3 of the same species at different stages of development. Don't pick old mushrooms; leave them to drop their spores. Bring your membership card and a friend or two. You are responsible for not getting lost. If you have that tendency stick like glue to others. We won't wait for you, and we won't come looking for you. Don't assume the accuracy of identification of the person standing next to you; they might not know as much as you do. Only club mycologists and identifiers should be used for advice. The Walk Leader will tell you when to be back at the walk starting place where the mushrooms will be put on paper plates and the Walk Identifier or Club Mycologist will put names on only the mushrooms that they know well. Take notes and pictures to help you remember the mushrooms. You should go home and check books yourself. Whether you decide to eat a mushroom is ultimately only your decision.

### WPMC COOKBOOK, VOL. 3

The WPMC has published 2 great wild mushroom cookbooks. They are filled with recipes that have been tried and are delicious. Many of the recipes have been prepared and served at the Gary Lincoff Mid- Atlantic Mushroom Foray. Everyone is looking forward to another one with great anticipation.

Volume 3 is close to being ready for publication. We need some more recipes. We need some recipes from you! Get published in a cookbook; show your family that you are a true gourmet cook. Your recipe needs to be one you have tried and enjoy. It cannot be one that has been published by someone else unless you have made changes to make it your own.

Please email your gourmet wild mushroom recipes to Becky Plischke at [morelbp@aol.com](mailto:morelbp@aol.com) or mail to 129 Grant Street, Greensburg, PA 15601.

<b>Mushrooms</b> —Sylvia Plath	The small grains make room.	Widen the crannies, Shoulder through holes. We	Tables, we are meek, We are edible,
Overnight, very Whitely, discreetly, Very quietly	Soft fists insist on Heaving the needles, The leafy bedding,	Diet on water, On crumbs of shadow, Bland-mannered, asking	Nudgers and shovers In spite of ourselves. Our kind multiplies:
Our toes, our noses Take hold on the loam, Acquire the air.	Even the paving. Our hammers, our rams, Earless and eyeless,	Little or nothing. So many of us! So many of us!	We shall by morning Inherit the earth. Our foot's in the door.
Nobody sees us, Stops us, betrays us;	Perfectly voiceless,	We are shelves, we are	

# Morel Madness Weekend

## - 2009 -

Hosted by: *The Washington County Department of Parks and Recreation and  
The Western Pennsylvania Mushroom Club*

### SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

#### Saturday, May 2nd

- |            |   |
|------------|---|
| 11:00 a.m. | Check-In / Registration (Roadside near the Henry House)   |
| 12:00 p.m. | Welcome, Introductions & Agenda Review  |
| 12:15 p.m. | Slide Show "Morels and Their Poisonous Look-Alikes"   |
| 1:00 p.m.  | Morel Hunting Excursions (on your own or with a group leader)                                   |
| 4:00 p.m.  | <u>Morel Madness Round-Up</u> . Return to Shelter 8 for Show & Tell and Mushroom Identification |
| 4:30 p.m.  | Dinner, Camp Set-Up (on your own)   |
| 6:00 p.m.  | Evening Mushroom Hunt with Park Staff; Meet at Shelter 8  |
| 8:30 p.m.  | Edible Wild Mushroom Slide Show at Shelter 8  |
| Dusk       | Star Party at the Observatory   |



#### Sunday, May 3rd

- |            |  |
|------------|--|
| 8:00 a.m.  | Rise and Shine Continental Breakfast at Shelter 8 (coffee, juice, donuts, muffins, etc.) |
| 9:00 a.m.  | Morning Morel Hunt; Meet at Shelter 8  |
| 12:00 p.m. | Program Ends - The rest of the day is on your own.                                       |

Note: Camping available Saturday night (no camping Friday).  
Pre-Register by calling the Park Department 724-228-6867.

## New WPMC Award Program

By Dick Dougall

Many people join the WPMC to find and identify edible wild mushrooms. While pursuing this goal, they become exposed to the incredible variety of mushroom species found on club walks and forays. (The WPMC's Life List on our website now has 824 different mushrooms.)

The Plischke family has strongly suggested a need to encourage WPMC members to improve their identification skills, with the ultimate goal of increasing the number and skill of club identifiers. To this end, they have pledged financial support for the **John Plischke III Award for Mushroom Knowledge**. This award will recognize various levels of identification skills for club members by awarding a series of buttons. The Plischke family is donating a button making machine and 1,000 button parts for this program in honor of Dr. John R. and Evelyn M. Plischke. Work has begun on the designs for the buttons. At a December 2008 meeting, the executive committee approved the concept of this award. Because this is a new program for the club, it is still a work in progress. Note that these are awards; there is no cost to recipients. This article outlines the present ideas of how this program would operate.

The ID buttons indicate the ability to identify 10, 25, 50, 75, 100, 150, and 200 mushrooms. Club members desiring to be part of the program will maintain their own lists of mushrooms they know. To qualify for an ID Button, the applicants must have each mushroom on their list certified by one of the club's identifiers or mycologists.

At the 10 and 25 mushroom level, easily recognizable mushrooms will usually be included. One way of certifying might be having the applicant choose mushrooms from an unsorted group of mushrooms brought to a meeting or found on a walk and be able to give their common or scientific names. At this level, being able to identify that a mushroom belongs to a specific genus might count, i.e. identifying *Russulas* or *Boletes*.



At higher identification levels, scientific names are encouraged but not required. It would be desirable to have the applicant be certified on mushrooms he/she has found. Certification requires an actual mushroom specimen which can be discussed between the applicant and the identifier/mycologist. Identifying from photos alone is not acceptable.

Edible mushrooms being certified as part of this program require special comment. The certification of a mushroom by an identifier or mycologist means that they agree with the applicant's identification of **one, specific specimen** of a mushroom. It does not mean that either applicant or identifier/mycologist will **always** correctly identify this mushroom.

The aim of this award program is to encourage club members to improve their mushroom identification skills for furthering their intellectual knowledge. Anyone considering gathering mushrooms to eat needs a higher level of certainty. Most guide books recommend identifying edible mushrooms multiple times with verification by an expert before consuming them. **PICKING MUSHROOMS TO EAT REQUIRES BEING 100% CERTAIN OF THE IDENTIFICATION OF THE MUSHROOMS INVOLVED.** Those eating wild mushrooms must take **personal responsibility** for the mushrooms they eat.

Learning additional mushrooms above the 50 level will require much more effort, careful examination and documentation. In recognition of this fact, awarding of buttons at these levels will be made at our Lincoff foray each year.

I hope that a number of club members will find this new program intriguing and will give it a try.

## Western PA Mushroom Club Offers Online Dues Payment

Paying our annual membership dues is now easier than ever.

The Western Pennsylvania Mushroom Club has just joined the ever-growing world of online shopping, online bill paying, online subscribing, and online banking. We have opened an account with Paypal - originally the payment system for eBay, but now a widely available, and user-friendly, mechanism for paying for many, many items and services.

To pay your 2009 club dues online, go to our website: [www.wpamushroomclub.org](http://www.wpamushroomclub.org)

From the homepage, click on the link that says "Join the Club". You now have 3 options:

- 1 You can come to our next monthly club meeting (3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday of the month, 7 PM in the downstairs meeting room of the Audobon Society's Beechwood Farm on Dorseyville Road). At the meeting you can fill out a membership application (so we have updated contact info) sign the release form, and give us a check or cash (\$15 Individual, \$20 Family, \$10 Full-time Student)

Or.....

- 2 You can download the membership application, sign the release, and mail it, with a check, to **Bonnie Bailey, 120 Mt. Blaine Drive, McMurray, PA 15317**

Or.....

- 1 You can download the membership application and send it to Bonnie via email and pay your dues online via Paypal. If you are not already familiar with Paypal, it is easy to set up an account. Like any other online shopping you might do, they will ask for your email address, billing address and a credit card number. You will be asked to create a password. Your email address becomes your Paypal login. It's that easy.

Questions? Contact Barbara DeRiso, Treasurer: [barbaraderiso@gmail.com](mailto:barbaraderiso@gmail.com)

Here's a tasty recipe that a friend of ours makes to hand out as holiday gifts. It's a bit peppery for my New England taste buds but everyone else I know devours it. If you have delicate eaters in your family just reduce the chiles and peppers. It's a delicious sauce with pasta or as a relish with almost everything.

-Ed

### George's Mushroom Mix

10 pounds of small or sliced mushrooms  
4 cups olive oil, 2 cloves garlic  
2 cups sugar, 3 cans Rotel (diced tomato w/ chile), 2 cups vinegar, 2 jars Pepperoncini (pickled peppers) diced, 1T salt, 1 jar Hot Pepper Rings, 3-4 12oz. cans Tomato Paste, 3-4 medium onions

Blanch the mushrooms, drain, and add oil, vinegar, salt, and sugar.

In a large pot add all the other ingredients together and begin to heat. Stir well to mix in all the tomato paste. Add the mushroom mixture. Heat to boiling while stirring often.

Remove from heat and fill into pint or quart sized canning jars. Process in boiling water bath 30-40 minutes. Check for sealing when the jars have cooled.

You can make a smaller batch and keep it in the refrigerator rather than canning. It will not linger long in the 'fridge as it is so delicious! ( Thanks to Kim Sims for the recipe.)

### *Congratulations to Award Winners, 2008*

**Congratulations to:  
Kim Plischke,  
chosen for the 2008 WPMC  
Service Award.**

**Congratulations also to:  
Dick Dougall,  
named winner of the 2008  
President's Award.**



## WPMC Officers 2009

Mary Tadler - Secretary,  
 Jim Wilson - Vice-President,  
 Barbara DeRiso - Treasurer,  
 John Stuart - President.



### Missing:

Heather Maceiko - Corresponding Secretary (see milk carton)

## How I started Mushrooming: Morels and more

by John Plischke III

Many mushroom hunters start out learning mushrooms because they either want to use them for food or they start out learning them from their relatives as a kid. It may be a parent, grandparent or uncle that showed them as a young child which mushrooms to collect and which ones are edible. This knowledge may have been passed down for several generations; it may have come to their relative from their parents or grandparents who learned it from one of their relatives from Europe. To them, mushrooming is and always has been a family tradition.

I started mushroom hunting as a child at about 4 years old. My Dad, Grandfather and Uncle Lawrence took me to the woods that spring in search of morel mushrooms. We went to the same location that my family has hunted morels for generations. Before we started hunting I was given instructions. I learned that morels resembled sponges and that the ones that grew there were about 2 to 8 inches tall. I could hardly wait to start the search but had to learn that there were poisonous mushrooms that sort of resembled morels. Unlike morels, which are hollow inside, these poisonous false morels had chambers or cotton inside. Impatiently I listened and learned that morels grew under tulip poplar trees, dead and dying elm trees and under the old abandoned apple orchard that was at the other end of the woods.

I also learned the signals that we were to use. A single whistle was given so we would be able to keep track of where we all were, we would whistle twice if we found one and three times if there were lots and everyone should come. I was told that I should always whistle instead of shout out so that anyone else in the woods would not know what we were doing so that the location would still be a family secret. With all the secrecy, it was like protecting a gold mine; it was not until later that I realized that dried morels were often selling for over \$160.00 a pound!

Finally, when we headed into the woods, instead of walking in a single file line like we did walking down the trail to get to the woods we would spread out about 40 feet apart and all head into the woods in the same direction. This would be done so we could cover more ground and find more mushrooms. There was so much excitement it seemed even better than going on an Easter egg hunt.

About 5 minutes into the woods I heard 2 whistles. My grandfather found one, and then he signaled for me to come. He showed me the morel and cut it off at the base of the stalk, explaining that morels should be cut and never plucked from

the soil. He taught me that cutting them not only keeps the mushrooms cleaner but does not disturb the mycelium that is the underground part of the mushroom. By this time my dad arrived and told me mushrooms were like apples on an apple tree, you can pick all the apples (or in this case mushrooms) and you will not hurt the tree. It's the same with mushrooms; just cut them off and they will keep coming back year after year.

Shortly after I left heading back to my route, my Uncle Lawrence hollered for me to stop. I did not realize that for the last 20 feet or so that I trampled on good number of morels. He then came over and told me look at the ground around me. When I started to closely look around me I noticed we were in a "field of morels", several hundred of them growing out about 30 feet around a large dead elm where we were standing. We filled half of our baskets under that one large tree. From that moment on I was hooked on mushrooming.

A few hours later our baskets were full and we were on our way home. I was so excited to show my mother how many of them I had found.

When we saw my mother back at the house my dad and I gave mom our mushrooms. I was very proud to give them to her. It was her job to prepare them. She

used a mushroom brush to clean our morels; then she cut them in half to make sure a poisonous one did not get into the bunch.

False Morels such as the Conifer False Morel (*Gyromitra esculenta*) contain a poison called MMH or Monomethylhydrazine which is rocket fuel. Often the cooks are the first to get sick from false morels since they can inhale the cooking va-



The Yellow Morel (*Morchella esculenta*) has a sponge like cap. In different regions people call it by a number of other names including Blonde Morel, Honeycomb Morel, Merkel, Morille, True Morel, Sponge Mushrooms, Sponges, Molly Moochers, and Dry Land Fish.



The 165 Giant Morels under this elm tree (see top left for part of the trunk) were 6 to 12 inches apart from each other and went out about 35 feet in all directions from the tree trunk. For some reason the Yellow Morels that grow under elm trees are typically much larger in size than the yellow morels that grow under other trees. Perhaps the reason is that there are more nutrients released into the soil from an elm when it starts to decline, or perhaps elms have larger root systems than many other types of trees.

pors. We always were extremely careful and never made a mistake. We found so many morels in the coming weeks that I got to try things such as morels stuffed with crab meat and chicken breast and morels in a cream sauce. I became addicted to mushrooms. After I learned all the 5 or 6 types of mushrooms that my family collected I had a desire to learn more species of mushrooms. Back then there was not a mushroom club in Pennsylvania, and it was very difficult to try to learn on our own. We did get several field guides and tried to compare unknown mushrooms that we found against pictures in the books. This was done in the dining room by laying all the guides and mushrooms on the table so we could compare the mushroom to the similar photos in each book. Sometimes we could narrow down that the new mushroom was probably one of the 3 similar photos in our guides but the problem was that one mushroom was edible and the other two were poisonous look alikes. We were not certain enough to risk our lives and try to eat them based on the field guide. So my parents started taking me to mushroom clubs in other states

How I started ... JPIII Continued from page 3

to learn mushrooms. Our first big trip was driving all day and night up to Maine to learn mushrooms for the 4 day event. Over the years we made dozens of trips all over the North East and I did get to learn 1000's of types of mushrooms and I now eat hundreds of types but the best way to learn is to join a local club.

We now have a mushroom club here in Western Pennsylvania. They have 9 meetings each year and about 30



The Conifer False Morel (*Gyromitra esculenta*) *Gyromitra* look like a brain or are wrinkled. They also lack the sponge like holes of a morel. Some people eat them but it is a very bad idea. The poison may or may not get you today, but it can build up in your system and kill. *Gyromitra* have chambers or cotton on the inside.

walks where we give slides shows and walks. The mushrooms are collected on the walks and are brought back and put on paper plates on tables where they are identified. One can look and see the edible mushrooms and their poisonous look alike and compare them side by side; learn from an expert; learning becomes easy. If I had this opportunity as a kid, I could have learned a lot more mushrooms.

There are several members of our Western PA mushroom club who, when they joined the club just a few years back, did not know any mushrooms or just one or 2 different types. They now know several hundred types; nothing could be more easy and fun



Morels and Trout

### Are Slime Molds Really Fungi?

(Used with permission from Connecticut Valley Myco. Society, Winter 2009 issue)

"No, slime molds are **not** fungi. They are members of the kingdom Protozoa. They used to be included among the fungi because people found their dry fruiting structures in the woods when they were out collecting fungi. In fact, the most characteristic structure of a slime mold is a plasmodium -- a giant amoeba with thousands of nuclei in a single mass of protoplasm.

This plasmodium moves slowly in decaying organic matter or the soil, eating - swallowing up or ingesting - bacteria and other tiny particles of organic matter.

When the giant amoeba has accumulated enough food reserves, or when the weather gets cold or dry, the plasmodium will undergo an amazing change, turning from a slimy, slowly undulating mass into a series of small, dry fruiting bodies which contain powdery spores. Slime molds used to be called Myxomycetes, implying that they were a kind of fungus, so they are now called Myxozelida, which is one of many phyla in the kingdom Protozoa.

(Remember that we now recognize **seven kingdoms**: two prokaryotic kingdoms: Archaeobacteria and Eubacteria and five eukaryotic kingdoms: Plantae, Animalia, Eumycota (fungi), Chromista (Stramenopila), and Protozoa.)" (from [www.mycolog.com](http://www.mycolog.com))

## From the technical literature

Mark Spear

The world of academic research contains hardworking, talented people who study full time what we do for a hobby. It usually doesn't pay much but it's more fun than a day job. The fruits of their labor are siphoned into articles in stogy overpriced monochrome magazines. By convention, each article is summarized in an abstract that states the most important findings. The purpose of this occasional column is to point out some of the more interesting abstracts that happen to cross my desk.

Since spring is near our minds are focused on Morchella. Winder and Keefer (2008) surveyed morel stands in burned areas of the Rocky Mountains in BC. They observed more morels where the duff was more burned, averaging 6,473 per hectare. Certain plants were associated with greater mushroom yield including, fireweed, heartleaf arnica, prickly rose, and white spirea. Grassy areas were more likely to be morel-free.

Bored of morels already? Barroetavena et al. studied factors influencing fruiting of the Slippery Jack (*Suillus luteus*) in Ponderosa Pine stands in Argentina. By comparing productive habitats and mushroom poor areas they drew some conclusions about where to look if you want to fill your basket. They say more Jacks can be found in zones with low crown cover (from the pines) and little duff. The mushrooms appeared to like lots of shrubs and damp organic soil. They go on to suggest that thinning and pruning pine stands could increase the mushroom harvest.

Can't find enough mushrooms? How about growing some? Mishra and Singh passed out some hints on growing Reishi mushrooms (=Varnish Conk = *Ganoderma lucidum*). They tried dozens of formulas but report their best production from wheat straw with rice bran, gypsum, chalk, and Epsom salt (5%, 1%, 0.2%, and 0.1%). This unappetizing mushroom enjoys a great reputation in herbal medicine.

Mushrooms can definitely cure what ails you if you are made of wood and what ails you is creosote, according to Polcaro et al. They used our old friend the Oyster mushroom (*Pleurotus ostreatus*) to detoxify creosote contaminated wood. By mixing sawdust, wheat straw, and Oyster spawn they say the creosote was broken down almost completely in 44 days.

We have all seen that humans are not the only species that eats mushrooms. But Witte and Maschwitz say they found a tropical ant species that eats almost nothing but wild mushrooms. This ant apparently does not cultivate fungi like so many others but depends on finding mushrooms where and when they happen to appear. When you think of all the times and places where you *don't* find mushrooms you start to see that a mushrooms only diet is not so simple.

Ever wonder about the mineral content in the mushrooms you find? This is not a trivial question since we need to eat some minerals and avoid others to be healthy.

Falandysz et. al. surveyed the mineral content of King Boletes (*Boletus edulis*) and the surrounding soil in a number of highland and lowland areas of the Sudety Mountains (in Poland and the Czech Re-

public). As you would expect the mineral content of the mushrooms was influenced by the mineral content of the soil. Unfortunately, where the soils have moderate levels of heavy metals like lead, mercury, and cadmium the mushrooms have higher levels of these unhealthy minerals (bioaccumulation or bioconcentration). You can even predict the soil minerals by looking at the mushroom minerals. They also found that the caps have twice the mineral content of the stipes.

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### Thought for the day..

Q. How can you tell a mushroom from a toadstool?

A. A toadstool will make you croak.

**Western Pennsylvania Mushroom Club**  
 129 Grant Street  
 Greensburg, PA 15601

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<b>Club Mycologists</b> Robert Boice blgym@msn.com 724-446-0524 John Plischke III fungi01@aol.com 724-832-0271 Kim Plischke Ladiebugzpk@aol.com 724-832-0271 Dr. Fred Schrock 610 South 7 <sup>th</sup> St, Indiana Pa 15701 La Monte Yarrall piggy@baqaqi.chi.il.us 412-854-5684	<b>Identifiers</b> Jack Baker vbbaker8@hotmail.com 412-367-7696 Doug Dickman larshalfass@yahoo.com 724-626-1542 Dick Dougall rsdme@imap.pitt.edu 412-486-7504 Gavin Farkas cocotruffles08008@yahoo.com Bob Lucas rnlucas@microspell.com 412-422-8976 Jim Strutz strutzj@strutz.com 412-965-9341 Jim Tunney aminitam@hotmail.com 412-441-3958	<b>Past Presidents</b> Dick Dougall 202 Wadsworth Dr. Glenshaw, PA 15116 rsdme@imap.pitt.edu 412-486-7504 Joe Luzanski (See Publicity Chair) pastpresjml@wpamushroomclub.org		