

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **When Going Mushroom Hunting, Make Sure You're Bringing Home Something Edible!**

Mushroom-hunting season is starting, and you may feel the itch to get out and find mushrooms of your own. Mushrooms grow in forested areas and on forest edges, where the climate stays cooler and more humid, and the mushrooms have decaying organic matter around which to grow. The weather is only beginning to warm up, so right now you will be more likely to find mushrooms on south and west-facing slopes. As the weather gets even warmer, north-facing sloped will also begin growing mushrooms.

Be sure to check the rules and regulations of any locations you want to mushroom hunt, and always ask permission when wanting to forage on private land. When gathering to sell, be sure that the place you're harvesting has no restrictions on commercial use. Places that allow foraging for personal use ban selling wild mushrooms to prevent overharvesting. Forage sustainably, and take only what you need, to ensure that you have harvests in future years.

The most common mushrooms beginners look for are morels, oysters, honey mushrooms, and Chicken of the woods, as these all have distinctive visual characteristics. Morels are arguably the most well-known mushroom. Because they are so popular with restaurants, people learn how to identify morels so that they can sell them. Chicken of the woods, also known as Sulphur shelf, is a mushroom that lives up to its name. It is a shelf fungus, meaning it forms platforms wherever it grows, that starts orange in the center and turns yellow near the edges. The colors are vibrant, which differentiates them from turkey tails, a non-edible look-alike. When cooked, the fungus has a taste and consistency almost identical to chicken. Reactions have been reported, and everybody's bodies are different, so when introducing a new food to your diet, it's always best to cook it thoroughly and consume in small amounts at first, in order to keep potential adverse reactions to a minimum.

The Kansas Department of Agriculture requires that gathered mushrooms be inspected for safety by an approved identifier, and offers classes every year that train attendees on how to identify edible mushrooms to ensure people have gathered what they think they did. One example is morels and false morels, close look-alikes that have a chemical that is metabolized in your body into a compound that is also used as rocket propellant. (Yes, really.) Note that this identification class only applies to gathered mushrooms. Commercially cultivated mushrooms, most of which will be oysters and shiitakes, do not need to go through the same identification class, and can be sold with no restrictions.

As with anything I write on gathering food from the wild, this comes with an important disclaimer: It is very important that you don't not eat anything you aren't completely confident in the identity of. While there are only a handful of plants that could kill you if you ate them, there are many more mushrooms that are potentially fatal. If you have any doubts about the edibility of a mushroom you've found, play it safe and contact a professional.

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