

THE FUNGUS AMONG US



by Lee Lamb

Autumn is *the* season for hunting and gathering. Or is it? Come spring, lots of folks hunt black bears and turkeys. Others scour the hills looking for *sheds*—the antlers that fall off male elk, deer, moose and caribou each spring before they start growing a new set. And there's another hidden gem on the springtime forest floor.

Morel mushrooms can be as elusive as elk. But with patience, know-how and a little luck, your family will have a blast finding and feasting on these mouth-watering morsels.

MORELS OR ELSE

A morel is slim and pointy, and its cap can be blonde to almost black with lots of deep pits and ridges, kind of like a prune. The cap and stalk are all one piece, but the cap is longer and darker than the stem.

It's a good idea to buy a mushroom guidebook before you hunt morels. And always take a grownup along who knows their mushrooms. "False" morels look like the real thing, but they're poisonous and can even kill you. An easy way to tell the difference is to slice the mushroom open lengthwise. If it's not hollow inside, it's not a true morel.

WHERE OH WHERE

Morels grow all over the U.S. except in the desert. Look for them where the soil is moist. Likely places are creek bottoms carpeted with dead leaves and around dead trees. What morels love best, though, are places that burned the previous year.

Morels are hard to spot at first, but if you find one, there are usually more nearby. The more you hunt, the better you'll get at guessing when and where they will be.

MMMM-MMM!

When you get your morels home, rinse them in cold water to wash off any dirt and bugs. You can cook them right away or dry them for later on. A simple recipe is to sauté morels in butter and garlic. They're delicious with elk steak!

CAN YOU HELP THIS LADYBUG FIND HER WAY THROUGH THE MOREL?

