



FALL MUSHROOM HUNTING

By John & Theresa Maybrier

Fall is upon us all and it is a wonderful time of year to get back into the woods.

The leaves are glowing, almost like they are trying to tell us something. If we take a minute to enjoy the spectacular colors it is easy to see

all the different types of trees. See the trees individually. Even though you might not know what kind of tree you're looking at, remember these simple tips; the oaks will not drop their leaves until spring, normally the maples are the really bright ones, ash and elm trees usually turn yellows. I like to look for places that have a lot of

different sizes of trees as well as color variety. In the summer the woods looks like a mass of green. It is not until you can get close enough to observe the leaves and the bark of the tree before you can identify it properly.

So why drive around looking at the trees? Well they are beautiful but that's just a bonus. SCOUTING! This is the very best time to check out new places to hunt for morels next spring. Morels. How can we possibly be looking for mushroom spots in the fall? The trees are the secret to knowing and understanding the relationship between the types of trees and the types of mushrooms you are hunting. For example, we all know that morels are especially fond of Elm and Ash trees. They also like Cottonwoods, Sycamores, Maples, Birches and lots of others, depending on the part of the country you are hunting and the types of areas you are hunting (hillsides or along rivers). One particular tree variety might be producing better than another. I have found some of my best new "secret spots" scouting in the fall.

Just like preparing for any type of hunt, a little research goes a long way to being more successful. Grab a book on trees if you are not that familiar with the different species, it's fun and I promise you will be a better "shroomer". If you decide to take a drive and scout out a few hills think about where you can hunt. It won't do you much good to find a great hill or valley that looks promising if it is someone else's private property.

If you need a little motivation and like to get out of the truck, stretch those legs, breath a little fresh air... now is the time for several excellent varieties of fall mushrooms. The oyster (*Pleurotus ostreatus*) mushroom or elephant

ear is one of our favorites. This mushroom needs warmth and rain to start it's growing cycle. The oyster grows on bark, on standing trees as well as down timber and stumps. You want to look for trees with heavily textured bark. Once the bark has decayed and fallen off and the tree is smooth the oysters will no longer return to that tree. They can fruit in huge quantities, last year we harvested forty pounds from one tree. The oyster mushroom is easily identified though it can range in color from white to a buff tan (like the color of an elephant's ear). The oyster mushroom is cultivated and can be readily found in your produce section. This is a good way to actually see and smell one. Some stores carry a yellow variety called canary oyster mushroom, there is also a pink variety, but normally they will be white. The wild oysters have a faint smell of anise and are host to a small black beetle with a red head. Give the mushroom a few good taps on the cap side with gills down and most of them will fall out.

Hen of the Woods (*Grifola frondosa*), also known by its Japanese name Maitake is another excellent mushroom growing in the fall. This mushroom only grows at the base of Oak trees and occasionally on a Hickory tree. It is a parasite that actually kills the tree over time. During this time it returns every fall. For a lot of people, this is their very favorite, even over Morels. Can you believe it? It takes its name for the way it looks, not the way it tastes. They can get quite large and from a distance they appear to look like a ball of feathers. This mushroom is a real treat and worthy of the search. They are more common in the Northeast but they do grow in the Midwest. Sometimes this mushroom is available in the produce section but as a much smaller version than the wild ones.

Another mushroom you might come across on your scouting trip is the Sulfur Shelf (*Laetiporus sulphureus*) commonly known as the Chicken of the Woods. This mushroom grows only on the wood of deciduous trees (leaf bearing). The bright orange shelf type mushroom is easy to recognize. The shelf like flat single mushroom or multiple overlapping shelves has no stipe (stem); the color varies from bright orange to yellow. This mushroom got its name because supposedly it tastes like chicken. I don't know if anyone cultivating this particular mushroom and I have never seen it at the markets.

Hopefully you have remembered your GPS and marked all the new spots with the Elm and Ash trees, along with the others we mentioned. Most of all, hope you had a great time in the woods and tried a few of the fall favorites. I should mention if you get out there and the leaves are gone, just look down, you should be able to get a good

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