

OUTDOORSUPDATE

OF THE OUTDOORS:

Tips For Hunting 'Shrooms, Asparagus

BY GARY HOWEY
Hartington, Neb.

This is the time of the year when Mother Nature's Garden starts to grow and mature.

Unlike other gardeners, Mother Nature doesn't see the need to plant her garden in nice neat rows like we do.

When gardeners see weeds and grasses growing in their garden, out comes the hoe, not Mother Nature as she has the right plan, allowing anything and everything to grow in her garden.

Now is the time that we hunters can hit the field, sandbars and wooded areas

without a gun and still bring home something for dinner.

It's morel and asparagus picking time in the upper Midwest, when both of these delectable edibles will poke their heads above the ground, just waiting for someone like you or I to come along and pluck them from the earth.



Gary Howey

Mushroom hunters in N.E. Nebraska have been out looking for the last week or so and finding a few morels, but not much more than enough for a meal of these delicious fungi.

Before getting into the who, what, when and where of mushroom and asparagus hunting, there's one thing that we need to remind ourselves of.

Don't forget, with any type of hunting or picking we need to get permission of the landowner before entering their land.

Morel Mushrooms

Morels generally appear prior to wild asparagus and can be found throughout our area, they are easy to recognize, delicious to eat, making them the most popular wild mushroom in the upper Midwest.

Elongated with an off white stem and a crown, covered with white ridges and dark brown pits, the morel mushroom are easily recognized.

Varying in color from light gray to dark gray, light tan to golden brown, pale yellow to yellow to dark brown, a morel looks like it to look for something growing on the ground resembling a cone shaped brain.

Morels start to pop out in mid to late April, with the best hunting or picking happening when temperatures hit the mid 50's and warmer.

In the upper Midwest there are several indicators that mushroom hunters use, to help them to know when the morels should be coming up.

If you have a lilac bush, crab apple tree or violets growing in your area, keep an eye on them, when they're blooming, it's a good sign you'll find morels.

I've always found morels to be up in good quantities around the week that Mother's Day falls on, which is this week. Other pickers use the almanac to give them a clue as to when morels will appear.

They find the average date for the last frost; add two weeks to that date and that should put you close to the peak of the morel season.

Moisture, sunshine along with warmer temperatures has a lot to do with when morels appear.

PHOTO: OUTDOORSMEN PRODUCTIONS LLC
Morels come in numerous different colors and sizes, resembling an elongated brain.

A week of 60-degree daytime temperatures after the frost is gone with no freezing temperatures at night will generally be a good time start looking for morels.

Along with warm temperatures, moisture is also important. Many mushroom hunters say that the best time to hunt for morels is after a rain, when temperatures are around 60 degrees with a high humidity.

Morels can be found earliest in sandy areas, on south facing slopes or in fields that have been burnt as these areas warm up quickly and retain heat longer.

You'll find the earliest morels on islands in the river, especially in sandy areas and areas where there are dead or dying trees.

The first morel is always the toughest to locate because they blend very well with the forest or vegetated ground. Once you've found one, kneel down, looking closely because morels are like schooling fish, if you find one you'll generally find a bunch.

One thing is for certain when it comes to finding morels, there's no set rules as to where the morel might be located. Conditions change from day to day during the spring and a hillside that was barren on Monday may get a rain shower or warmer temperatures, causing the hillside to be loaded with morels by Wednesday.

My preferred method for locating mushrooms isn't real scientific; it's the old meandering method, picking my way through the vegetation until I spot one.

It's a good idea to stop from time to time and kneel down, getting a better view of the area as many times as morels will be pushing up through the leaves and can be verily visible.

Because mushrooms reproduce through spores that need to be returned to the ground in order to grow. In order to allow the morels to throw their spores, it's not a bad idea to use collection bags that are porous such as onion bags or some type of a bag that allows the spores to be released back into the air.

Mushroom hunters or shroomers as they're called down south have their own language and in mushroom hunters' jargon, a bunch of morels is known as a "mess."

Once you've found a mess of mushrooms, they need to be cleaned up and prepared.

The first thing that you'll want to do is to split the mushroom in half from the top to the bottom. The rinse them off over running water as the crooks and crannies

PHOTO: OUTDOORSMEN PRODUCTIONS LLC
Fence/power lines and tree belts are excellent places to look for wild asparagus, as these are places birds roost.

of the mushroom may contain sand or insects. After you've rinsed them thoroughly, you'll want let them set in water for a short period of time in order to flush sand, debris or stubborn insects out of them.

Don't let them soak in water for an extended period of time as they will soak up the water and become spongy.

Then the best part of morel hunting begins, preparing and eating them.

There are numerous ways to prepare morels including, fried and in mushroom soup. One of my favorite ways to prepare the morels is to fry them up in some type of batter.

An excellent batter can be made by combining equal parts beaten eggs with milk and crushed up saltine crackers.

After rinsing them, let the mushroom drip off on a dry towel and then dip in the mixture made from the beaten eggs and milk, coating them thoroughly.

Place the coated morel into a pan and cook in butter until crisp. Don't over cook them, as they will dry out.

Morels are best when prepared fresh, but if you have a good mushroom hunting season and would like to preserve or save some of them for future use, mushrooms can be dried, frozen or blanched.

Wild Asparagus

Wild asparagus appears about the same time as mushrooms, but I've had my best luck finding the more mature spears after mushroom picking is done when temperatures begin to warm up.

Don't rely on the asparagus growing in your neighbor's garden, as it will appear later as gardens are clean and generally contain darker soil, causing the ground in a garden to warm up more quickly.

The ground that wild asparagus grows in is covered with last year's grasses, plants and debris, keeping it from warm up as quickly, because of this wild asparagus may not come up as early as that found in a clean garden.

Look for last year's plants that have gone to seed, they are more of a golden color clump or bush, and resembling dried up tumbleweed. You'll find the new growth sprouting in amongst last year's plant.

Once you've found your first asparagus shoot, scout the area carefully as the seeds of the older plants may have been dropped or blown a short distance from the original plant.

The best places to look for wild asparagus is along fence lines, power lines, old railroad right of ways and places birds might land or congregate.

In the fall when asparagus goes to seed, birds will pick the seeds off the plants, fly off and pass the hard pit or seed which drops on the ground and if conditions are right, a new asparagus plant will pop up. Asparagus, like morels need warm soil and moisture to grow, so sandy areas along fence lines seem to be one of those areas where asparagus comes up first.

If you find asparagus along a fence line, and there is a shelterbelt/tree planting near by, be sure to check them out closely as the birds will have set in the trees and may have deposited seeds in these areas.

Since asparagus gets woody, it's best to harvest the tender shoots; this doesn't mean that the larger taller stems won't be edible.

On the larger stems, it's best to grab them by the top, bending it until it snaps, as it will separate or break off at the woody part of the stem.

Cleaning asparagus is easy, simply cut off the dried up end, rinse and prepare.

I'm one of the few who enjoy asparagus in my family, so I won't have much competition when it comes to preparing and eating fresh asparagus.

To prepare it, I simply boil it until tender; top it with some butter substitute, a little Mrs. Dash or other seasoning and then pig out.

Morel and asparagus hunting are excellent ways to get outside and to not only enjoy the outdoors but to also enjoy the bounties that Mother Nature provides.

Gary Howey Hartington, Neb., is a former tournament angler, hunting and fishing guide. His *Outdoorsmen Adventures* television series www.outdoorsmenadventures.com can be seen throughout the upper Midwest.

Kansas Angler Catches 4.34-Pound Crappie In Farm Pond

BY BRENT FRAZEE
(c) 2010, The Kansas City Star

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Gerard Rausch doubts that he will ever have another day of fishing like the one he experienced one recent Sunday.

He spent the morning turkey hunting near Chanute, Kan., and decided to go fishing at a farm pond almost as an afterthought. He got his new rod and reel out of the truck and tried a few casts before he got a backlash.

Here's where the story gets good. He let his lure, a Mepps spinner, sink to the bottom while he untangled the line. When he got things straightened out, he reeled in the line quickly — until a big bass abruptly stopped it.

"That bass weighed 6 pounds," said Rausch, 25, who lives in Chanute. "It was the biggest one I've ever caught."

But wait, the story gets even better.

On his next cast, Rausch again was greeted with a jolting strike. But this time it wasn't a bass. It was a giant crappie.

When the fish surfaced, Rausch rushed into the water to land it. Later, he was headed to nearby Humbolt, Kan., to get it weighed.

The white crappie weighed 4.34 pounds and could break a Kansas state record that has stood for almost 50 years.

The existing mark, 4.02 pounds, was set in 1964 at a Greenwood County farm pond by Frank Miller of Eureka, Kan. Now Rausch is challenging that mark.

It's still not official; he still has to file paperwork and go through a routine 30-day waiting period. In fact, Doug Nygren, chief of fisheries for the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, said his agency still hasn't seen proof that the fish was weighed

on certified scales or gotten statements from witnesses.

But Rausch says that is coming. And he's confident his fish will pass the test and go into the record books.

"I'm pretty stoked about it," Rausch said. "I've fished this pond since I was a little kid. To have it happen there makes it all that much more special."

Rausch had no idea the pond had super-sized fish in it. After a flood several years ago, the small body of water overflowed and lost some of its fish to a creek that runs below it. Rausch assumed the big ones were gone.

"All I had been catching was little, bitty crappies," he said. "I didn't think there were any big ones left."

Now, he's glad he was wrong. After catching the fish, Rausch tried to follow proper procedures to get the fish verified. But that was a battle.

He went to B and W Truck Beds in Humbolt to get it weighed on certified scales in front of witnesses, but he couldn't get in touch with anyone from Wildlife and Parks.

Wanting to keep the fish alive, Rausch and his wife put the crappie in a large cooler and put an aerator in it. But they knew it would die if left overnight.

So they decided to head to Bass Pro Shops in Springfield, which has large aquariums to display gamefish and staff who know how to handle native fish.

Today, the fish is being quarantined in a tank until Wildlife and Parks biologists can examine it and perhaps take tissue samples to verify that it is a purebred white crappie.

"We drove 172 miles to get to Bass Pro," Rausch said. "But we're glad we did."

"We wanted to keep the fish alive so that we'd have proof."

First-Timer's Luck Hooks Hunter

BY PAUL A. SMITH
(c) 2010, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

Turkey hunters have some usual tools and tactics to help put a bird on the table. Calls and decoys, to name two.

Leave it to a first-timer to buck tradition.

Damian Dominski of New Berlin, Wis., has been a deer hunter for 35 years but had never hunted turkeys until this year.

He applied for and received a first-period turkey permit in Zone 2. His plans basically entailed hunting from a ground blind on property he owns in Menomonee Falls, a spot he knows well from years of bowhunting.

"I thought I'd go out and see what the morning would hold," said Dominski, who owns a Milwaukee glass business with his wife, Kathy.

You know, hunt for a few hours, then get in to work."

So one Thursday, Dominski awoke well before dawn and made his way to the property, a mix of wetlands and uplands bordered by a railroad line. His gear was limited to a shotgun, a pair of binoculars and some camouflage clothing.

The morning was glorious, said Dominski, with wildlife visible from the first minutes.

A pair of deer moved across a

high spot in the marsh. Sandhill cranes called from the distance. Blue-winged teal flew past.

As the sun rose, Dominski saw that he had some company — about 50 yards away, a Canada goose sat on its nest atop a muskrat house.

"Just a perfect morning," said Dominski.

But for the first few hours, no sign of turkeys.

About 8 a.m. Dominski thought he heard a funny rattling sound in the distance.

He craned his neck, looking and listening. "Did I hear it or didn't I?" he asked.

Five minutes later, he had confirmation — a second "gl-obble-obble" carried on the breeze.

Ten minutes after that, a single tall, black bird was visible walking down the railroad tracks.

Dominski fixed his binoculars on the bird.

"It stopped every few steps and puffed up," said Dominski. "Then it would drop its feathers and look around to see if anything was watching."

All of this was new to Dominski. He watched, fascinated, as the bird strutted down the tracks.

Dominski was about to receive his first of two gifts from the turkey hunting gods.

A pickup truck sped down an

adjacent highway and bounced across the tracks. The turkey scooted off the tracks and moved toward Dominski's blind.

But its course put it close to the goose nest. The Canada, exercising maternal and territorial instincts, flapped off its muskrat condo and intercepted the turkey.

The gobbler wanted none of the goose. The turkey took a short, evasive flight — directly at Dominski.

The long-beard landed 20 feet from his blind. Dominski might be new to turkey hunting, but he didn't need anyone to tell him a shooting opportunity was at hand.

In seconds he was fixing a tag to his first turkey. The bird had a 9-inch beard and weighed 18 pounds.

The next order of business was to call his wife at work.

"You're late," Kathy said.

"But I've got something," said Damian.

Kathy, who had wondered why her husband wanted to hunt something "so ugly," decided differently after viewing the bird.

The iridescent feathers, the blue and red on the head, the brown and black tail fan.

"Pretty bird," said Kathy.

Damian was preparing to cook the bird this week. And he is attempting to tame his new hunting addiction.

OUTDOOR REPORT

Archery Center To Offer Women's Beginner Courses

The Easton Archery Center will offer a four-week beginners' course for women age 18 and up, beginning Monday, May 17.

Classes will run from 5:30-6:30 p.m. each Monday from May 17 to June 14, with May 31 off for Memorial Day. Archery equipment will be provided.

Class size is limited. For more information, contact the Easton Archery Center, 800 Archery Lane, or call 260-9279.

Captain Norm's Walleye Classic Set

The inaugural Captain Norm's Walleye Classic will be on Saturday, June 5, on Lewis and Clark Lake in Yankton.

There is an entry fee of \$50 per team (2 person teams) and a limit of 49 teams.

For more information, call 605-665-4271.

GFP Application Needed For Fishing Tournaments, Special Events

PIERRE — Fishing tournament organizers in South Dakota need to make sure that they have filled out the proper Game, Fish and Parks Department paperwork when planning their events.

Applications for fishing tournaments and special events must be filed with GFP no later than 30 days before the events are held.

"During that 30 days, the Department can collect the necessary signatures and take care of any special requirements," said Dana Ertz, GFP special events permit coordinator. "Some events will require a proof of insurance or a special waiver."

Ertz added that it is important to use the current 2010 application because it is date-sensitive.

The 2010 application includes important information for tournament organizers, such as the dates during the year when fishing tournaments are not allowed to be held, as well as dates when salmon and walleye catch-and-release tournaments are restricted.

Completing the event paperwork as soon as possible helps all of the parties involved avoid problems. "This advance notice allows us to make sure there isn't another event already planned at the same time, at the same location," Ertz explained.

Fishing tournament and special event applications are free and may be found on the GFP website at <http://www.sdgifp.info/Publications/SpecEventFishTournAppForm.pdf>; they can also be obtained from a conservation officer or park manager.

GFP Commissioner Receives Honor

PIERRE — South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks Commissioner John Cooper has been honored by the Wildlife Management Institute with the 2010 George Bird Grinnell Memorial Award for distinguished service to natural resource conservation.

Cooper, who served as GFP secretary from 1995-2007, was recently appointed by Gov. Mike Rounds to a four-year term as a member of the GFP Commission.

Presenting the Grinnell Award, Wildlife Management Institute President Steve Williams observed that Cooper's career has been widely acknowledged and acclaimed. "His prior accolades had no bearing on consideration for this award. What did have bearing was and is John's undaunted dedication to the higher principles and practices of professional resource management."

During his tenure as GFP secretary, Cooper was a leader in state and national wildlife management issues. He chaired the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies' Law Enforcement and Executive committees. He was AFWA president in 2005-2006, and he served on the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, Adaptive Harvest Management Group, North American Wetlands Council and Governing Board of the National Fish Habitat Action Plan.

"The Wildlife Management Institute is very pleased and proud to extend its George Bird Grinnell Memorial Award for Distinguished Service to Natural Resource Conservation to John Cooper," concluded Williams. "We have no doubt that George Bird, himself, would have commended our selection and John for his stellar career to date."

The Wildlife Management Institute is a professional conservation organization that works to improve the professional foundation of wildlife management. The organization gets involved on issues and projects at the request of wildlife agencies, Congress, college and university researchers, private conservation organizations, and professional associations.

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