

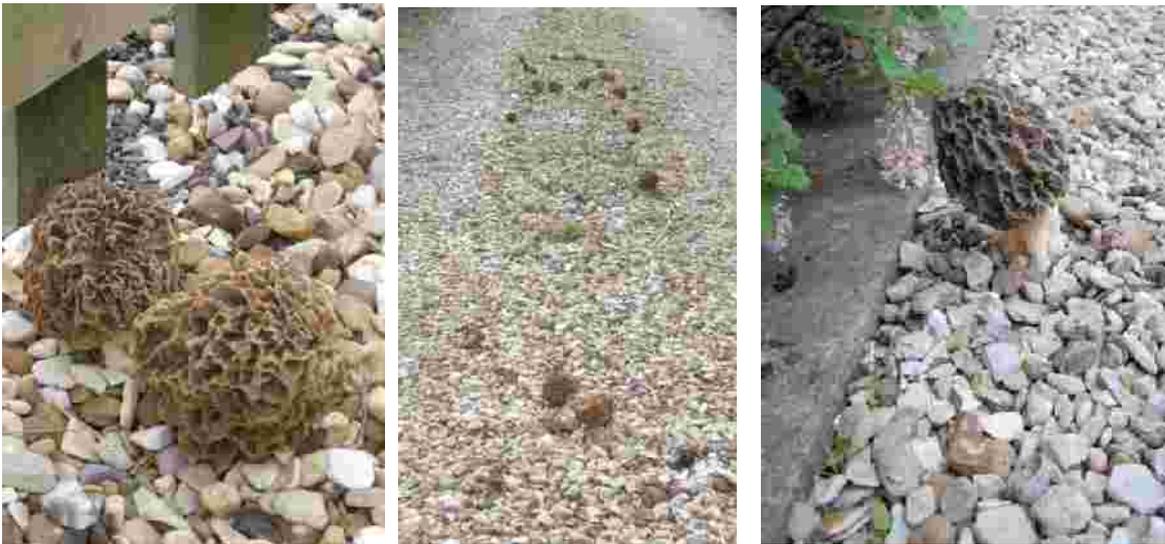
# MUSHROOM NEWSLETTER

25 April 2012

## MOREL MANIA!

While Wales is generally a wonderful place to live, in spring it can be frustrating for the mushroom lover. As I've frequently complained, our soil is far too acid for morels to be a possibility and so far – well at least as recently as Sunday 22 April – there are no St George's.

This is where you lot have really got me salivating. Several of you have taken the time to send news and pictures and it seems only fair to pass on the good news to others who may share your soils and climate.



David Cowcill found these gems in gravel paths near Peterborough

So, for example, one regular newsletter reader, David Cowcill, followed the advice to look for morels in alkaline areas and almost immediately struck gold just north of Peterborough.



Michael Webber and Dawn Charman find morels in urban and suburban parks

Likewise, Michael Webber got lucky in Essex. This last is interesting, because although I haven't checked with him, the photograph suggests it is growing in a bark-mulched border. Over the past couple of years several readers have reported finding morels in public parks where the use of such weed smothering mulches is increasingly common (in cash-strapped times it is a useful way of cutting gardening costs). Surprising as it may seem, the bark is often imported, so flower beds in urban parks can make great fungal hunting grounds and turn up some unusual finds. Certainly this has been Dawn Charman's experience in Newcastle – the picture above was taken a couple of years back, but it proves the point.



Richard Webber found these in South Cambridgeshire – the two on the right weighed 100g combined

Richard Webber (no relation, as far as I know, to Michael), found morels in his garden and, suspecting they were edible, then found me by Googling. He explains the area was once an orchard which then reverted to rough pasture. Last autumn he blitzed it with weed killer and reseeded it with grass. The basic geology is chalk and marl, but there is also a lot of wood

ash as he used to have regular bonfires on the site. This rough treatment is interesting because morels love waste ground, famously appearing on bomb sites following the blitz and in 'burns' after forest fires in America.



The false morel bears only a superficial resemblance to its edible counterpart

Richard was, however, worried that they might be false morels. These are perfectly edible when cooked (they are sold for consumption in Finnish markets), but deadly poisonous when raw. Just for the record, rather than the pitted surface of the true morel with its sharp ridges, the false version looks more like a brain, with a cap which is dimpled and rippled. When cut in half, rather than one big chamber running up the stalk and into the cap, it is divided into several chambers.



Andy Murdock and Andrew Wright have found St George's near Southampton and Stroud respectively

Meanwhile, other readers have been more fortunate with the St George's than myself. Reports of finds are beginning to flood in from around the country. These are welcome, but hardly surprising given that we have just had the eponymous saint's day. Far more unexpected were the field blewits found by Dawn Charman in the North East. These are supposedly an autumn species and so something had triggered them into unseasonal activity. That

said, they grow in the spring in Turkey, so clearly spring weather patterns can mimic those of autumn under some circumstances.



Dawn Charman has also found St George's near Newcastle-on-Tyne, but her field blewits are a surprise

Jon Bemrose also made an interesting find and one which most readers can easily emulate. He discovered frozen wild mushrooms in his local Lidl (I suspect Aldi might also merit a foray). Anyway, John bought two packs for the princely sum of £2.99 each. These were 300g of chanterelles (pfifferling) and 600g of mixed waldpilze (listed as - chanterelle, yellow boletus, oyster mushroom, slippery jack, bay bolete). He says the chanterelles 'held up well' when fried in butter, although the mixture was 'a bit more "slippery" as expected, but still tasty'.

So, once again, thanks for your news and photos. Please keep them flooding in – without them, this newsletter would not have been possible and an army of sentinels is far better than relying on one relatively sedentary mushroom nut. I promise to try to use and credit anything I receive (unless anonymity is requested). Do also feel free to forward this e-mail to anyone you suspect would be interested.

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P.S. As always, let me know if you want to be removed from the list and I will do it forthwith.