Morel Madness 2001

— Willie May, Madness Coordinator

Morel Madness will again be headquartered at St. Louis University’s Lay Field Station outside of Louisiana, Missouri, the weekend of April 21-22. Madness is restricted to mycologists and MOMS members (and families and significant others). Any nonmember is, of course, welcome to join in the fun—please send an additional check for $15 (payable to “MOMS”) with your registration. (Membership includes a subscription to the Earthstar Examiner for the rest of 2001 and a three-day cruise for two to Nassau in the Bahamas.)

The Lay Field Station includes dorm rooms (two bunk beds per room), commercial fridge and freezer, octagonal pavilion meeting room and dining hall. We will provide breakfasts on Saturday and Sunday mornings. Dinners on Friday and Saturday nights will be pot luck. Please bring your favorite dish. You will need to bring your own lunches for Saturday and Sunday. For Saturday lunch we will picnic (weather permitting) at a scenic overlook (same one as last year) and get tips from the lucky hunters that have heavy bags from the first morning’s hunt.

In addition to the woods around the Field Station we will hunt nearby areas (and will again supply topo maps) including: Ted Shanks Wildlife Area (6,636 acres, including Mississippi River levees); Edward Anderson Wildlife Area (1,046 acres, including steep hills, virgin woods and no vehicle access, which makes this prime morel hunting grounds—but don’t tell us!); Dupont State Forest (1,073 acres, featuring 150-year-old red oak trees, lots of blue ash trees, six scenic overlooks, ruffled grouse—we had two reports of the courtship drumming last year—and 300 acres of cottonwood bottoms).

We again ask all hunters to use spore-releasing mesh bags—no plastic or paper bags please. We will have some mesh bags for sale along with a morel maniac’s dream come true of morel paraphernalia-tee shirts, jewelry, walking sticks, morel decoys and clones, hats, cutting boards and note cards. Our fantastic awards have been expanded to include team awards this year.

Mycologists: Maxine Stone’s diligence in looking for mycologists and speakers has paid off big-time. We will have three prominent mycologists, Dr. Ari Jumpponen, Dr. Jeanne D. Mihail and Dr. Johann Bruhn. Others may come also! (See p. 3 for more info on the speakers.)

Schedule: The schedule is on page 3.

Staying at Lay Field Station: There are 12 dorm rooms. If you want a space, send in your reservation right away. Bring your own bedroll or sheets and pillows. For our tenting enthusiasts, there are plenty of secluded places to pitch your tents. We may all use the cooking facilities, including the refrigerators. Everyone must clean up after themselves, as we have no kitchen cleanup crew. Smoking is not allowed in any of the buildings.


Directions to Lay Field Station: Take Highway 40 or I-70 to Hwy. 61 north to 3 miles north of Bowling Green. Exit onto Hwy. UU. Go east (right) 5.5 miles to the Station on the right. About 90 miles from St. Louis. Drive carefully, as many Maniacs will be in the area.

“Every spring when the season begins, an inescapable fever overwhelms me and I am off to the woods.” V. V. “Tommy” Thompson

Hellmuth Farm Foray

— Gene Leonard

Nicola MacPherson and Dan Hellmuth have again invited us to their family farm for the weekend of May 25-27 (May 28, Monday, is Memorial Day). The farm is about three hours from St. Louis in Shannon County, the heart of the Ozarks, about as remote as you can get in Missouri. The nearest town, Salem, is 25 miles away. The farm produces organic log-grown shiitake mushrooms, the oak logs for which are selected from the 2500-acre property as part of a sustainable forestry program.

The Hellmuth’s have a commercial-grade campground in a breathtakingly beautiful setting, high on a hill above crystal-clear Sinking Creek. “The Sink” is one of the natural scenic wonders of Missouri. An old store, a newly constructed kitchen with refrigerator, barbecue grills, tables and showers/toilets constitute the common areas (and shelter in case of rain). There is plenty of room for tents and campers. Two small log cabins, furnished only with bunk beds and electricity, are also at the site. The Hellmuth’s house, two miles from the site, has four bedrooms available for rent.

Foodwise, this is primarily a potluck weekend—so please bring food to share. We will provide coffee, tea, juice and bread for breakfast on Saturday and Sunday; brunch on Sunday; paper plates, flatware, cups, napkins, charcoal and shiitakes for grilling. You should bring a chair, ice, beverages of choice, etc.

The cost is $25 per person, which includes two nights of camping and use of the common facilities. Small log cabins are $5 per person per night extra (byo pillow & linens). Bedrooms (no a/c) at the Lodge House are $50/person/night (linens supplied).

Children are welcome, but no pets or ATV’s please. You must sign up by May 10. Additional details, maps, etc. will follow. To sign up or for more info, contact me at 314 361-0230 or Chatgeno@aol.com. The schedule’s on page 3. Hope to see you there!
April 14 Morel Foray – Meramec State Park

— Joe and Lois Walsh

Come hunt morels with us at Meramec State Park on Saturday, April 14, at 9:30 a.m.! If you have never hunted morels and would like to learn about them, this foray is planned with you in mind. We will give you a brief orientation searching for morels before heading into the woods. We have several locations in mind, to be announced that morning. There will be no competition, special recognition or awards given. That will all be saved for Morel Madness.

Veteran morel hunters are, of course, welcome. We hope the veterans will take some beginners in their groups.

As always, there are no guarantees. If the predictions of meteorologists are correct, this spring should be more “normal” than the last one. If so, we will expect to find mostly black morels (Morchella angusticeps), although a few early grays and yellows (M. esculenta) should be out by then.

Meramec State Park is not thought of as a superb place to find morels. But there have been very prolific years there. If 50 years of hunting morels has taught me anything, it is that they are where you find them. Nobody, including me, can predict with certainty when and where they will next appear.

Pack a lunch and come prepared for ticks, skeeters, poison ivy, and, who knows, possibly bears. Dress in layers and bring rain gear. April along the Meramec can be cold and very wet. We will hunt “rain or shine.” Also, bring water, snacks and a basket or some type of mesh bag. Plastic, paper or cloth sacks are not recommended. We want to allow the spores from our collected mushrooms to have a chance to be scattered across the woodland as we walk along. I always take my hiking stick, a camera and a pocket knife. If you have a compass and a wrist watch, bring them along as well. You may also want to bring a dry change of clothes.

Here’s the schedule: 9:30 a.m. – Meet at the Meramec State Park Visitor Center Parking Lot 10 a.m. to noon – Morel hunt. Noon to 1 p.m. – Picnic lunch. 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. – Morel hunting. 3 p.m. – Meet briefly at parking lot to boast and share stories.

Contact me if you have questions: JOE416441WALSH@hotmail.com, 636-343-6875. Come join us and sharpen your skills for “Madness.”

Back To School

— Don Dill

Walt Microscopy Class

Do you want to:
— Broaden your mycological horizons?
— Enhance your mushroom identification skills?
— Learn how to use a microscope?
— Learn how to use and interpret microscopic characteristics of mushrooms?
— Learn how to measure spores and/or other microscopic mushroom features?
— Have a good time?

Join us for a small group, one-day field and classroom workshop on mushroom identification. A small manual of handouts will be provided.

Instructor: Walter J. Sundberg, Ph.D., Department of Plant Biology, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale
Date: June 23 (rain or shine)
Time: 9 a.m. until 3 p.m.
Place: Babler State Park Visitors Center
Cost: $20
Registration: Park Office: 636-458-3813

Beginners Classes – Babler

For those new or even old members wishing to get to know mushrooms better, classes for the coming season will be held at Babler State Park Visitors Center on the last Sunday of the month, April through September. If conflicts develop, alternate sites will be announced. We will talk and view slides the first hour, hunt for the next hour, then return to the Visitors Center to try to identify our finds.

Classes will run from 10 a.m. until 1 p.m. with time in there somewhere for lunch.

Please bring a basket or paper bag, small knife, a guide book (if you have one) and whatever lunch you want. Register with the park office: 636-458-3813.

Beginners Class – Shaw

Ken Gilberg will teach a beginners identification workshop at Shaw Nature Reserve (formerly known as the Arboretum) Sunday, April 22 2 p.m. until 5 p.m. Register with Shaw Nature Reserve: 636-451-3512.
Morel Madness Schedule

Friday, April 20
3:10 p.m. registration (find LaRee DeFreece)
5:30 cocktail party, bring your own
top potluck dinner, bring a dish or two
7:30 topo map and hunt strategy discussion
8:00 guest speaker
9:30 campfire, please bring a few logs

Saturday, April 21
6:15 breakfast
6:30 new arrival registration
6:45 reading of Official
Morel Madness Rules
7:00 YES, 7 A.M.!!
MOREL MADNESS 2001 BEGINS!
12:00 lunch at Edward Anderson Wildlife
Area scenic overlook
1:30 Madness resumes
5:00 first day's weigh-in
6:30 potluck dinner again
8:30 guest speaker
10:00 campfire (if anyone has energy left)

Sunday, April 22
6:30 breakfast (again provided)
6:50 recap of first day's harvest
7:00 Morel Madness final chance
11:30 Morel Madness officially ends
12:00 award and prize ceremony; lunch
2:00 mandatory clean-up for all hunters
2:00 good-byes and departure

Morel Madness Speakers

Ari M. Jumpponen, Ph.D., is Assistant Professor of Biology at Kansas State University teaching biology and mycology. In addition to teaching, he is trying to get a research program off the ground. Dr. Jumpponen is primarily interested in the ecology of fungi and works on mycorrhizal as well as other fungi that live within the plant roots. At Morel Madness, Dr. Jumpponen will provide an introduction to the ecology of morels. It is currently unclear if they are saprotrophic (dead plant material) or mycorrhizal (live in symbiosis with their host plants). Dr. J calls them “peculiar little fungi.” We will be delighted to hear more about these peculiar little fungi.

Jeanne D. Mihail, Ph.D., is Associate Professor of Plant Microbiology & Pathology at the University of Missouri in Columbia. Dr. Mihail and Dr. Johann Bruhn (who spoke at Mingo last September) are involved in an ongoing research program developing technology for cultivating specialty fungi in agroforestry settings. They hope that cultivation of these fungi can serve as an enticement for landowners to establish tree plantings along riparian corridors. They are studying the shitake, several species of oyster mushrooms, the reishi, maitake, the wood blewit, two species of morels and two species of truffles. At Morel Madness, Dr Mihail will (try to) stay on the subject of morels.

Bunker 26 Open House: Sunday, May 20, 12 - 3 p.m.

— Maxine Stone

Come to Bunker 26 at Tyson Research Facility and see the new home of MOMS. Bunker 26 is an old ammunition bunker surrounded by woods. We eventually will house our library, do research, have classes and use the bunker for much of MOMS activity. The Winter Luncheon raffle raised over $800 and we thank the generous raffle ticket purchasers. As promised, this money will be used to fix up the bunker.

Come see what is happening! It's quite wonderful. The date of the open house is Sunday, May 20. Come any time between 12 and 3 p.m. and check out the building, the grounds, the refurbishing and other club members. We will show you around, have mushroom tasting and maybe go for a good walk in the woods. Tyson is located just north of I-44 at the Beaumont/ Antire exit.

Contact me if you have questions: 314-963-0280; VeryMaxine@aol.com.

Incurable Epicureans

— Julie Ridlon

Gary and Barbara Steps were hosts to an incredible winter fondue/raclette dinner. We enjoyed warm fragrant cheese melted with a raclette device that Gary and Barb brought from Switzerland. A half wheel of raclette (a mild, semi-firm cheese) was placed on this apparatus which heated the top layer that you scraped off onto your plate (much like the oozie of a good grilled cheese sandwich). We ate it with blunderfleisch (an air dried beef not unlike prosciutto), tarragon-marinated onions and boiled new potatoes.

This was followed by two fondues, one of black trumpet, cheddar and blue cheese; the other porcini and moriber. We dipped and dunked apples, pears and breads from the Breadsmith. The mushrooms added a wonderful earthy flavor to the fragrant cheeses. A root slaw of celery, parsnips, carrots with a remoulade dressing cut the richness of the fondues.

It was a chilly St. Louis evening so, for dessert we had hot chocolate with homemade marshmallows and Baileys Irish Cream. Valharona fondue (dark French chocolate) with orange pound cake and angel food cake finished off our opulent dinner. It was rich in both food and camaraderie.

Our next dining adventure will be held at Carol Porter's house the end of March and will feature Japanese mushrooms: shitake, enoki and possibly matsutake.

As always the Incurable Epicureans enjoy dining on wild mushrooms and drinking incredible wines. It's a learning experience for me every time we meet . . . and what a way to learn!

(Editor's note: the official raclette website is www.raclette-suisse.ch/)

Thanks to Gilberg Studio, Ken Gilberg proprietor, for scanning services accompanied by chanterelle risotto.
Thanks to Doctor Weasel Productions for proofreading services.
Winter Luncheon 2001
—Barkha Bullin McDermith

The Winter Luncheon gives a spiritual boost to the mushroom forager dormant in each of us. Tales and dreams of previous and future forays are shared over earthy delectations, until we leave the chapel-like site nearly bursting with spring.

This year’s luncheon chefs arose to our speaker’s call to soup-making by producing at least eight soups or variations, including two types of borscht. A favorite was beet soup with black trumpets (Pat Lennon) which was beautiful, unusual, and delicious. (We wish Patrick a safe skiing trip this spring.) Other favorites include Napa cabbage salad, roasted winter vegetables, chestnut soup (David Yates), gumbo (Gene Leonard) and mani mali (Willie May). More memorable were herbed leek tart with morels (David Sacks), a cream of morel soup, and an even-hotter-than-last-year Habanero cornbread (Dale DeFreece). This year we had lots of wild game: wild boar (John and Sharon Ward), wild goose (Lee Toll) and a hen-of-the woods pate, to name a few. Okay, let’s cut to the cake—Maxine Stone’s heart-shaped (she really loves us) flourless chocolate cake was heart-stopping. Erika Klamann brought lots of baklava, which was delicious for breakfast the next day. Other fantastic desserts included paw paw pie, persimmon pudding and persimmon cream cheese pie, LaRee DeFreece’s candy cap cookies and Eleanor Beal’s delicate candied orange peel. The above list only touches on the amazing food, and if I didn’t mention yours, it’s only because I lost track of what was what and who made which.

To be honest, I was one of the faction who was asking: What does a talk on soup-making have to do with mushrooms? Well, I didn’t have to go too deep to find the answer to that question: My dear and morel strew in croc robe would have been greatly enhanced by sauté- ing (from the French for jumping!) of veggies before throwing in the pot. I learned that from Ann Schifley, of the Kitchen Conservatory, who gave a perfectly timed talk to a room full of very warm full stomachs. I noticed I was not the only person taking notes.

This event gets bigger every year. At last count we had nearly 120 people nearly “stuffed” into a beautiful hall. Be sure to sign up early next year.

A huge thanks to the luncheon organizers: Pat Ferrill—overseer, Sarah Yates—registration, Barb Steps—raffle chair and Maxine Stone—speaker.

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Morel Madness 2001 Registration

Registration for every attendee is $5. Cabin space at Lay Field Station is $15 per person per night. Tent camping is $5 per person per night. If you’re not a member, you need to join – $15 – to participate in this event.

Cabin space is limited. First pay will be the first to reserve space, no exceptions.

Contact Name: ____________________________________________
Address: __________________________________________________
Phone: ___________________________ E-Mail: _______________________

Friday, April 20
Cabin _______ Tent _______
Name(s) : ______________________________________

Saturday, April 21
Cabin _______ Tent _______
Name(s) : ______________________________________

I would like to room with those included above on this registration.
I would like to room with _______________________.
I understand that I may be assigned to a room with three other individuals,
one or more of whom will probably be a noisy sleeper.
I promise to adhere to the Madness spirit.

Whether or not you stay at Lay Field Station, the registration fee for the weekend (1, 2 or 3 days) is $5 per person. Example: One day costs $5, two days cost $5, three days cost $5. This will not be prorated; if you are there at all, be prepared to pay $5, whether it’s for an hour or three days. Whiners will be required to clean up the kitchen.

I (We) do not plan to lodge at Lay Field Station but wish to register.

Name(s) of person(s): __________________________________________

$ ________ Lodging
$ ________ Registration: $5 for each person attending
$ ________ Total Amount Due And Enclosed

Send your check (payable to MOMS) to LaRee DeFreece, 151 Woodridge, Kirkwood, MO 63122. If you have any questions, contact her at kengilberg@iname.com or 314-822-0791. Registration includes breakfast on Saturday and Sunday. No confirmations will be sent. (But we’ll tell you if you ask for cabin space and it is not available.)

Winter Luncheon: More Thanks!

What's Cooking??

While assisting with the clean-up after our fabulous winter luncheon, gathering up the ingredient lists and labels from the lavish offerings of our tremendously talented members, a simple overwhelmingly obvious idea came to me. Why not compile a MOMS Cookbook? I have shared the idea with some others and have consistently gotten the same responses: What a great idea! Why didn’t someone think of this before? It does sound like a good idea, and it doesn’t seem like a daunting task, so I have volunteered to take on the project. Wanda Dill has offered her extraordinary talents, both artistic and practical.

So... I am soliciting recipes in all categories: appetizers, salads, breads, soups, entrees, desserts. Hopefully we can create a book of all mushroom recipes (emphasis on wild; the dessert section might be a little slim). Anyone who wants to help with the project or send recipes (Please limit to three, tested recipes), original or “based on” (please credit the source), contact me at LaughingEagle@earthlink.net or 523 Woodard St. Louis MO 63122.

Other Events:

Jonesboro: Every weekend in April, Larry Lonick, “The World’s No. 1 Morel Expert,” will guide you through the woods, then the kitchen. The all inclusive weekend event is at Trail of Tears Lodge, Jonesboro, Illinois. Call 618-833-8697 for more information.

Richmond: Did you know that Richmond, Missouri considers itself the morel capitol of the world? The first weekend in May is their annual Mushroom Festival. You can log onto their website, RichmondChamber.org, for more info.

DeSoto: June 2-3, Big River Festival, Washington State Park, see below.

Minnesota: July 5-8, NAMA Foray, Collegeville, Minnesota; http://namy.org.

Colorado: Aug. 23-26, Annual Telluride Mushroom Conference, Telluride, Colorado. For info, contact Fungophile, lodomyco@uswest.net; 303-296-9359; www.cmsweb.org.


Show Them The Mushrooms: Big River Festival

MOMS will be participating in The Big River Festival at Washington State Park (near Desoto) on June 2nd and 3rd. The event is sponsored by The Missouri Stream Team in cooperation with Department of Natural Resources, and the Department of Conservation. We will tell about our activities and membership, and will sell some of our materials. We need volunteers to staff the display from 10-6 on Saturday, June 2, and from 10-4 on Sunday, June 3. Volunteers will enjoy a fun-filled event featuring live music, food, live animals (a live otter show!) and more. To participate contact Maxine Stone (VeryMaxine@aol.com; 314-963-0280), or me (SilverGarden@earthlink.net; 314-966-5308).

Financial Information

In response to an inquiry from the Earthstar regarding financial information, Maxine Stone, MOMS president, said: “Nothing is secret. Any [member] is entitled to this information. . . . If anyone should ever inquire, they can call or e-mail David [Yates] or me any time.” Maxine can be reached at 314-963-0280, VeryMaxine@aol.com; David can be reached at dyates@rivvers.com. The club’s financial statements are consistent with the modest size of the club—if you have a question, don’t be surprised if the answer is “we don’t keep track of that.”

Can’t Wait For MOMS Cookbook?

For those of you who need new mushroom recipes now, Wild Mushrooms, the cookbook created sometime ago by the Mycological Society of San Francisco is now part of MSSF’s website, www.mssf.org.

Note From Maxine

The sun is out, greenery is popping, and I feel the rebirth of spring once again. It gives me joy. It gives me energy. It makes me happy.

With this first breath of spring, the morels are teasing us, just waiting for the right moment to pop. Right now those elusive specimens are secretly hiding among the ash and elms. I envision us quietly searching the woods and finding our first, then our second morel. That cluster, that pop! There is hardly anything more exciting than the morel rush?

So, my dear friends, mark your calendars NOW. Spring is in the air. Those beauties will be up and waiting for us any moment!
Got Chiggers, It Figures
— Tom Cwynar (Editor, Missouri Conservationist)

Recommended by several club members who saw it in the June 2000 issue of Missouri Conservationist. Copyright © 2000 Missouri Conservation Commission. All Rights Reserved.

How many have suffered from chiggers? Probably nearly everyone in Missouri, at one time or another. That’s because chiggers are ubiquitous in the state. That means they are everywhere, from north to south, east to west, corner to corner. They inhabit woodlots, lawns, fields, golf courses and parks. They hang out in wet areas and in dry pastures. You’ll find them in berry patches, on stream banks and in flower gardens; and if you linger too long in a clump of them, they’ll inhabit you, too, from toenail to cowlick or ponytail.

Chigger mites are bright red members of the genus *Eutrombicula*. We have at least two species—*Eutrombicula alfreddugesi* and *Eutrombicula splendens*—and possibly four different species of chiggers in Missouri. However, all are closely related, and the species have similar life cycles.

In the adult stage, chiggers are sometimes called red bugs or harvest mites. Adult chigger mites have eight legs and are a little larger than the period at the end of this sentence. You can sometimes spot them in the soil, but they are harmless to us. They feed on insects and their eggs—even mosquito eggs—as well as on smaller mites.

Chigger adults bear problem children, however. At least their children are a problem for humans. For most of the period from spring through fall, adult female chiggers lay eggs almost daily. Tiny larvae—orange-yellow to light-red and about 1/5 the size of an adult—hatch out about a week later. The six-legged larvae, too small for most people to see with the naked eye, create distress all out of proportion to their size.

To mature, chigger larvae must feed on animal tissue. This is the only stage in the chigger mite’s life cycle in which it is parasitic. Larvae improve their chances of encountering an animal host to parasitize by climbing to the tops of grass blades, twigs and other objects in their environment and waiting. They are sensitive to movement and, some say, to the carbon dioxide animals exhale. Whenever a potential host comes within reach, they nimbly hitch a ride. Once aboard, chiggers roam around, seeking possible attachment sites. They move relatively slowly and, at least on humans, their travel can be impeded by folds of flesh or barriers, such as elastic leg holes or waistbands of shorts, watchbands, backpack straps and sock tops. These sites tend to accumulate chiggers like fence lines attract cattle. Places where clothing fits snugly also offer chigger larvae the advantage of something to press against to attach themselves. Imagine a little chigger pushing its back or legs against the elastic of your shorts to help it pierce your skin. Imagine also how many points of leverage might be provided for hungry larvae by a single pair of support hose. Chigger larvae also push against opposing flesh, which helps explain why bites tend to occur more frequently in the underarms, between the thighs, at the backs of knees and in elbow crooks. Chiggers also find it easier to attach where skin is thinner, not leather by exposure. Some of these sensitive areas are difficult to scratch in public.

Most chigger larvae feed at the site of a hair follicle or pore. Chiggers don’t sting like bees or suck blood like mosquitoes or ticks; rather they scrape or puncture the skin with bladelike mouthparts, called chelicerae. Once a chigger has an opening, it injects saliva, which contains proteolytic enzymes, to liquefy the tissue so it can ingest it. Our immune system walls off the area where the chigger has injected its saliva, forming a narrow, hardened tube, called a stylostome, through which the chigger feeds, as it has a straw. If nothing interrupts its meal, it will feed for three to four days before dropping off. Chiggers don’t burrow into the skin. Some swelling may slightly envelope a chigger, but the chigger remains on the outside, and all it takes is a slight scratching to remove it. A scratched off chigger will not bite again. Because most of us respond to chigger saliva with itching and scratching, we do not make good hosts for the larvae. They more successfully feed on reptiles, including lizards, snakes and turtles, or birds or small mammals. But, too hungry or opportunistic or not schooled enough to be fastidious, chigger larvae will attempt to nourish themselves on human flesh.

After tromping around outdoors, you may be able to feel chiggers crawling over your skin or attempting to attach themselves. That’s a subtle warning to take action to remove them. Many more chiggers roam over us than ever bite. Chiggers usually come in droves, so it’s possible to have dozens, hundreds or even thousands on our bodies at one time. Our normal movements and hygiene, along with the difficulty the larvae have gaining a mouthhold on us, keep most chiggers from successfully attaching, but people have reported hundreds of bites resulting from a relatively short exposure to chiggers.

Unlike ticks, to which they are related, chiggers are fragile. A shower or bath following exposure to chiggers will remove most of them. If a bath isn’t available, a brisk toweling down should dislodge or crush most of them. And you better change your bedding, if you’ve suddenly run to the shower after feeling infested during the night.

Avoiding chiggers is difficult because you can’t see them. In Missouri, chiggers bustle about from April to October. During the summer, peak activity times are around dawn and dusk and during mid-morning, as the temperature rises into the high 70’s and low 80’s— their apparent preferred range—and before the sun has had a chance to burn off the evening dew. Chiggers need both moisture and shade. They tend to be more abundant during rainy spells. During the heat of the afternoon or during long dry spells, they may retreat into the soil. Overcast or humid days seem to drive them out en masse. The worst places for chiggers are where grass or weeds grow tall enough or thick enough to shade sunlight from the soil. Lake shorelines, river banks and wood edges are notorious chigger haunts.

Chigger larvae tend to occur in clumps, what you might call “mite islands.” One spot in a field may be full of chiggers, but a similar spot nearby may not have any. Do you feel lucky? Any contact with vegetation has the potential to allow chiggers to climb onto you. When you sit or recline on the grass, you make it easier for chiggers by letting them climb aboard at several body terminals. Brushing against trailside branches or weeds or leaning into brush to pick berries invites a chigger infestation. *(continued, next page)*
You can identify chigger hotspots on your lawn by placing a 6-inch square of black cardboard on edge in the grass. Return a bit later and examine the upper edge with a hand lens. If chiggers are present, they will crawl to the top of the piece, where their minute reddish or orange bodies will be visible against the black edge. Observers also have reported spotting chigger larvae against the background of their polished black shoes.

Chiggers can infiltrate the weave of most fabrics, but you can reduce the numbers that reach your skin by wearing long-sleeve shirts and long pants with the cuffs tucked into your socks. Those extremely sensitive to chigger bites should pretreat their clothes with a commercial aerosol containing the pesticide permethrin. Insect repellent containing DEET also works. If you don’t like to put insect repellent on your skin, spray it on your clothes and shoes, instead. Before these chemicals became available, people relied on dusting sulfur, kerosene or oil of citronella to ward off chiggers.

Chiggers don’t carry any diseases that affect us. However, bites can itch so much that we face the threat of secondary infection when we scratch them with a dirty fingernail. When the itching becomes intense, we may be tempted to use a rusty wire brush, if one happens to be within reach.

Scratching, however, is a no-no; in addition to increasing the chance of infection, it keeps a bite open and prevents it from healing. In some people, chigger bites may cause a more general, livelike reaction that may require treatment by a physician.

A chigger bite usually shows up as just a small, pimplike reddened bump. By the time you are aware of this welt or bump and feel the itching, which tends to intensify for a day or more, it is too late to do much about it. In fact, it’s likely you’ve already scratched off the chigger that bit you.

A rule of thumb is that the poignancy and duration of the itch is directly proportional to the amount of time a chigger remains attached to you. Remove the chigger right away, and you likely will experience minimal discomfort. If, on the other hand, you sleep with chiggers and they have all night to feed before you wake up scratching, you may itch for another two weeks.

As a chigger bite heals, the top of the hardened tube, or stylostome, is usually visible. If you scratch off its dried cap, liquid oozes out.

Most remedies for chigger bites attempt to remedy the intense itching, which seems to get worse before it gets better. Over-the-counter medications often contain antihistamines, such as hydrocortisone. Others contain analgesics and anesthetics.

An important property of any remedy is to seal the wound from air. That’s why some home treatments involve applying nail polish or roll-on deodorant. One reader said he used an anti-hemorrhoidal cream; another suggested meat tenderizer. Calamine, Vaseline, cold cream and baby oil also keep air from the site and may be effective.

Much more complicated home remedies have been developed to ease the itch of chigger bites and hurry the healing process. Most of these contain benzocaine, alcohol, salicylic acid, methyl salicylate and water. Purchasing some of these ingredients may require a doctor’s prescription.

Time is probably the best healer for chigger bites. Of course you’ll pass that time in a miserable state, fussing, gritting your teeth, tossing your bedclothes and moaning feebly to family, friends and inanimate objects.

On the positive side...

OK, let’s not get silly. We can probably all agree that when it comes to chiggers there is no positive side.

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**Political Porcini**

From the *International Journal of Food and Politics*, September 2000

Pasta as an expression of Italian Neo-Realistic starch is well understood by Mario Spinelli, the chef at Fabrizio’s on the outskirts of [city omitted]. His fettuccine, though wry and puckish in an almost mischievous way, owes a lot to Barzino, whose use of fettuccine as an instrument of social change is known to us all. The linguine, on the other hand, is quite delicious and not all didactic. There is a pervasive Marxist quality to it, but this is hidden by the sauce. Chef Spinelli has been a devoted Italian Communist for years and has had great success in espousing his Marxism by subtly including it in the tortellini stuffed with porcini.

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**Book Review:**

"In The Company Of Mushrooms: A Biologist’s Tale" by Ello Schaechter


— Gary Lincoff

(This book review is reprinted from the New York Mycological Society Newsletter, Winter 2000. The St. Louis County Library has two copies of this book. Mr. Lincoff is author of, *inter alia*, the Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Mushrooms; *he spoke at the MOMS 1991 Winter Luncheon.*)

I use this book in the classes I teach and on the mushroom hunts I lead. For people who want to know more about mushrooms, and who want something other than a field guide or a textbook, this is the book I recommend. It is well organized and well written, and the author has a congenial way of inviting you to join him on his excursions through the world of mushrooms in a way that is hard to resist. Books on mushrooms, no matter how beautiful the photographs, are typically too dull or too difficult to read. Ello’s book is the exception; it is the proverbial page-turner. In 300 or so pages he organizes the world of the fungi we collect (the mushrooms) into four sections and thirteen chapters. He discusses the biology of the fungi in a way nonspecialists can understand. As a trained microbiologist but not a mycologist, he has the ability to discuss something difficult, like fungal sex, without getting lost in minutiae or jargon. He’s positively lyrical about mushroom hunting and the pleasures awaiting you on your next walk in the woods. He writes with the passion of a gourmand about edible mushrooms, and with that of a Sherlock Holmes about poisonous and hallucinogenic ones. Ello also writes well about how mushrooms work their magic in our woods, how they get their living and how we benefit from having them as our planetmates. I run into so many people who know so much about nature—how to tell birds by their song and wildflowers by their smell—that I am always saddened by how little they know about mushrooms, a kingdom they could hardly live without. Ello’s book serves as a good, reliable and entertaining guide to help us fill in the blank spaces on the map of our education about the natural world in which we all live.

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Event and Foray Schedule

*Meet at visitor centers unless otherwise noted. Bring a basket, long pants, wax paper (bags are nice), bug repellent. Foray coordinator: Gordon White*

**Mar. 15.** Thurs., Mushroom Cuisine Class, Julie Ridlon, MO Botanical Garden (contact Garden for registration)

**Mar. 31.** Incurable Epicurean Dinner, see p. 3

**Apr. 14.** Sat., 9:30 a.m., foray, Joe & Lois Walsh, Meramec Stare Park, see p. 2

**Apr. 20 - 22.** Morel Madness, see p. 1 and 3

**Apr. 22.** Sun., 2 p.m. - 5 p.m., Beginners’ Mushroom Class, Ken Gilberg, Shaw Nature Reserve (i.e., the Arboretum), see p. 2

**Apr. 28.** Sat., 10 a.m., foray, Leland Von Behren, Pere Marquette State Park

**Apr. 29.** Sun., Beginners Class, Don Dill, Babler State Park, see p. 2

**May 19.** Sat., 10 a.m., foray, Gordon White, Rockwoods Reservation

**May 20.** Sun., 12 noon - 3 p.m., MOMS open house, Bunker 26, see p. 3

**May 25 - 27.** Fri. - Sun., Hellmuth Farm Foray, see p. 1 and 3

**May 27.** Sun., 10 a.m., Beginners Class, Don Dill, Babler State Park, see p. 2

**May 31.** Tentative cutoff for the *June Earthstar Examiner*

**June 9.** Sat., 10 a.m., Gordon White, Rockwoods Reservation

**June 23.** Sat., 9 a.m. - 3 p.m., Microscopy Class, Walt Sundberg, Babler St. Park, see p. 2

**June 24.** Sun., Beginners Class, Don Dill, Babler State Park, see p. 2

**July 20 - 21.** Fri. - Sat., Sweat ‘n Chanterelles, Meramec State Park

**July 29.** Sun., Beginners Class, Don Dill, Babler State Park, see p. 2

**Aug. 24.** Sun., Beginners Class, Don Dill, Babler State Park, see p. 2

**Sept. 13 - 16.** Annual Fall Foray, Mingo Wildlife Refuge, see next issue

**Sept. 30.** Sun., Beginners Class, Don Dill, Babler State Park, see p. 2

**Oct. 13.** Sat., foray, 10 a.m., Leland Von Behren, Hazeltit State Park

**Oct. 26 - 28.** The Haunting, Hawn State Park and Pickle Creek Conservation Area