

# taft times

Spring 2009

Northern Illinois University Lorado Taft Field Campus

Oregon, IL



## Spring Treasure



The first signs of spring are swelling tree buds and bright green shoots that seem to magically sprout from the earth. Spring ephemeral flowers open up in the sun, giving universal hope and a warm fuzzy feeling that winter is finally over. Yet there is something else that spring brings, oft forgot. The warm weather and sudden moisture causes many mushrooms, laid dormant all winter, to birth a fruiting body. Once desiccated fungi suddenly bloom, unfurling their withered bodies to form delicate structures, some frilly, others colorful. For those who know to look, this spring occurrence is simply magical.

The most significant of the spring mushrooms is the morel. Famed by mycologists for its deliciously earthy and nutty flavor, it is well worth the time to search for these babies. Indeed, this edible mushroom is the perfect prize for amateur mycologists as it is easily recognizable and quite distinguishable from all other fungi. Yet even the most experienced of mushroom hunters will gloat over a morel find. Grizzled old men know of secret collecting sites, kept carefully hidden even from other family members. Some gather together, collectively fanning out through the woods searching the ground with their eyes for the distinctive morel shape. Those who know the secret know to look on the ground underneath dead elm trees, especially once 'tree leaves are the size of squirrel's ears'. A tree dead two or three years will be the best bet, although some spots will produce for years on end. Sometimes a single solitary mushroom will be all that is found, other areas will fill an entire bag in one go.



A medium sized fungi that has a distinctive fruiting body. The morel is hollow, and its cap is honeycombed with meandering ridges and irregular shaped pits. The overall color is a warm tan or yellow-buff. This mushroom is edible, but should always be cooked first.

*(Continued on page 2)*



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The American Elm leaf

Even for those people who do not have the time or the place in which to search for these beauties, there is still hope to experience this wonderful spring bounty. For a price, morel mushrooms can be bought from roadside stands or even in specialty grocery stores. Although relatively expensive, most agree that morels are well worth the price. There is a plethora of ways in which to eat morels, all of them delicious. The delicate flavor of these mushrooms turns even the most boring pasta dish into a suddenly exotic extravagance. They can be stuffed, added to soups, or eaten with steak. In the most basic preparation one simply slices the mushrooms in half and sautés them in butter, a suspiciously simple method with results that are that both mouthwatering and tasty.

However you choose to eat them, however you choose to collect; I welcome you to the club. Flashy spring flowers and green vegetation are certainly a gorgeous sight after a winter of blah browns, but there is another treasure out there that is often missed by those only searching for color. The morel mushroom, camouflaged amongst a blanket of dead leaves, is a welcome find for any lover of spring. Happy Hunting!

## A Flavorful Feast

Are you tired of the boring drab of the same meals week after week. Are you trying to break out of the Monday meatloaf night blues. Well no worries we are here to help spice up your meals, with a helpful hand from nature.

### **MOREL MUSHROOM SOUP**

- 4 c. morels, fresh
- 1 med. onion, chopped
- 2 stalks celery, chopped
- 2 c. asparagus, cooked
- 4 c. milk
- 4 tbsp. whole wheat flour

Salt & pepper to taste. Sauté morels, onion and celery in a small amount of oil until barely tender. Stir in flour gradually, add milk, salt and pepper. Add cooked asparagus. Simmer until slightly thickened.

### **GARLIC MUSTARD PESTO**

- ½ cup olive oil
  - 1 cup pine nuts or walnuts, chopped
  - A few cloves of garlic, chopped
  - ½ cup finely grated Parmesan cheese
  - 1-2 cups garlic mustard leaves
  - 1-2 T. garlic mustard taproot, finely chopped (optional)
- Mix together in a food processor; serve with pasta or baguette!

*(Continued on page 3)*

(Continued from page 2)

### CANDIED VIOLETS

1 cup sugar + extra  
 1/2 cup water  
 Fresh violet blossoms

Combine 1 c of sugar plus the water in a saucepan and boil until syrup spins a thread. Cool to room temperature. Using tweezers, dip blossoms into syrup and shake off excess syrup. Dip into granulated sugar. Place on wax paper and dry thoroughly before using.

[http://www.cirrusimage.com/fungi\\_morel\\_mushroom.htm](http://www.cirrusimage.com/fungi_morel_mushroom.htm)  
 Troy Gardens– Madison, WI

## Rocks Rock!



Fossilized Coral

Taft has had a rich geologic history although you would not know it by the rocks you see. First, the area was once under a shallow warm ocean very much like you would see in the Bahamas today. At the time the North American continent was sitting on the equator. This meant the temperatures were also similar to the Bahamas. Crinoids, Corals and Trilobites were commonly seen in the waters at the time. As the animals died their shells would fall to the bottom of the ocean. The build up of calcium carbonate helps form the limestone and dolomite we see at Taft.

As the plates shifted over the next 500 million years we came to be located much closer to the North Pole than the equator. Over that time many different types of environments emerged and subsided. The land Taft sits on has also seen the rise and fall of the glacial periods. These glaciers scoured the land bringing pieces of the rock the glaciers traveled on to deposit elsewhere. This means some of the rocks found in Illinois were brought here from Canada. This includes the very rare finds of diamonds and raw copper. You most likely will not see these at Taft. The rocks you will find are granites and basalts. Not quite as rare, but definitely interesting to look at. So if you visit Taft you may want to watch where you walk. Not all rocks are the same!



Fossilized Trilobite



### Thanks Tom!

After ??? years at Taft, maintenance staff member Tom Symons will be retiring. We will miss his always smiling face and ever helpful personality around campus. Good Luck in the future and don't work too hard!



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## Zero Food Waste Hall Of Fame



Everyone who comes to Lorado Taft works hard to reduce their food waste. This semester, we would, once again, like to acknowledge those schools who have reached the promised land of zero ort.



Illinois School for the Deaf  
Washington Gifted



Unfortunately, we do not have the space to recognize the many schools who make it into the "1 Pound Club" by achieving 1 pound of ort or less. Congratulations and keep working towards zero ort!



## Contributors to Taft Times

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