

Maine Mycological Association

The Where, When, What, and How of Forays (plus, some tips and cautions)

Where:

The date of the foray and general location is published in the most recent newsletter. Forays are rain or shine unless otherwise noted. Directions are emailed in the week or two before the foray. If we do not have your email, please reach out. You will find that contact information published in the most recent newsletter.

If there is another drought this season, with few or no mushrooms fruiting, the foray will be cancelled, and you will not be notified of the specific location.

When:

Forays are generally scheduled from late June through late October, once or twice a month. Forays are held on Saturday or Sunday, morning or afternoon.

A typical foray generally follows this format:

The first 15 or 20 minutes is for making introductions, orienting to the site, collection techniques, and discussion of collections from home;
into the forest for 45 minutes or so;
placing mushrooms on display tables: 15 or 20 minutes;
identification and discussion of collections: 1- 2 hours.

Please arrive on time and return to the tables on time. Stay on the trail, or with a group, if you are unsure of an area or typically get confused in the woods.

What to bring:

Collections from home!

Children!

A basket, knife, small paper bags and/or wax paper,
a 10x lens if you have one,
the field guide you use.

Your preferred note taking instruments. We prefer that you focus on the mushroom and discussion, discouraging photos and videos, which require you to focus on procedure. We do not permit posting photos or videos on social media.

What to think about not bringing:

Your dog. Dogs are not allowed at some foray locations. Where they are allowed, they are required to be always on leash. If you do not respect these requirements, you will be asked to leave. Leaving your dog in the car is not an option at most foray sites.

Please realize that some people are not comfortable around dogs. Does your dog always respond to your commands? Is your dog safe around people and other dogs? Will your dog be comfortable in a crowd of 20-60 people? Is your dog polite with other dogs? Can you pay attention to discussion, while watching your dog? Forays are educational events, not simply a walk in the forest with your dog.

Always remember that you are legally responsible for your dog's behavior.

How to Collect:

Collect only fresh (not moldy, soggy, or maggoty) specimens.

With a knife or other tool, dig into the substrate to get the entire mushroom, including its base, which may be long.

Try to collect a mature and a young specimen of the same species in the same bag. Try not to mix species.

Make a note of the substrate the mushroom was growing on (living tree, dead wood, ground). Don't collect all the mushrooms you see. If you are certain that the mushroom is edible, leave 70% to do their valuable jobs spreading spores to maintain the population, and as mycorrhizae, decomposers, and food for wildlife.

How to display on the tables:

Observe the mushrooms on the tables. Attempt to place yours with similar collections. We first sort mushrooms by spore bearing surface: gills, pores, teeth, corals, puffballs.

Those categories are further sorted by spore color, but that takes practice to predict.

The Discussion:

With over 2000 mushrooms identified as growing in Maine, not many have common names. Those that do are either good edibles, or toxic. Common names change from field guide to field guide, field guide to internet sources, and from geographic area to geographic area. We will use a common name when appropriate. Taxonomy is changing. We use the Latin name, the binomial, for specificity, rather than ambiguity. However, as mycologists learn more about relationships between mushrooms, the binomial changes. Over time some of those new names are not determined to be valid, creating layers of binomials. Thankfully most newer field guides include previously recognized binomials, allowing cross-referencing. Changes will be discussed when possible. A list of mushrooms identified at each foray will be posted on the website.

The Clean-up:

We encourage you to take your collections home for further study. You may take other collections by asking permission of the collector.

Mushrooms that are not taken home are scattered in the forest, never left in a pile!

Tips:**How to make a spore print:**

Best done at home, the color of the spore print is one of the diagnostic features usually needed to determine the genus and species of a mushroom. Use a mature or very close to mature mushroom for a spore print. Boletes can be very reluctant to provide a spore print.

Place the mushroom cap with its fertile surface (gills, teeth, spines, or pores) facing down on paper or glass. Warning: use something impervious under the paper. Cover the cap with a bowl. Check after a few hours to observe the color of a spore print.

Find a Buddy:

In addition to studying your field guide, the best way to learn is to find a buddy who knows just about as much about mushrooms as you do. As you work on identifying mushrooms together, you will help each other, and the work you've done will help you remember. We can give you names and information, but it takes more than just listening to learn characteristics that identify a specific species.

Leave Early:

We remember how it was at our first forays. There were so many different mushrooms on the table that by the time all were discussed, we forgot what we wanted to remember.

It's not rude to leave when you've heard as much as you can remember. Confusion quickly attacks after that! Try to leave when you've learned one or two, or ten, however many. Do take examples home to spore print and study.

Cautions:

Ticks are prevalent from April to snowfall in Maine. Please understand what you need to do to keep yourself safe.

Hornets, yellow jackets and bald face, may be present in the forest. Be wary!

Poison Ivy may be present on some sites. Know how to identify it!

Know where you are in the forest, and how to return to the tables.