

Wild Mushroom Harvesting in PA
-- Regulatory Requirements & Guidance --



There are over 200,000 wild mushroom species in this Region of the country, of which about 200 are edible and only 25 worth eating and normally sold. However, mushrooms picked in the wild and sold to consumers, that haven't been verified as safe by an individual with adequate training, could result in serious illness and/or death.

Individuals who offer for sale wild harvested mushrooms as raw agricultural commodity or as a processed product, must meet the following requirements as set forth by the Department.

Foragers/ harvesters of wild mushrooms must first be approved by the Department's Bureau of Food Safety & Laboratory Services prior to harvesting (incl. processing) of wild mushrooms intended for retail sale or wholesale to other food facilities or businesses.

The following verifying documents must be submitted with a formal letter (or email) to:

PA Department of Agriculture
Bureau of Food Safety & Laboratory Services
2301 N. Cameron St. Room 112
Harrisburg, PA 17110

The harvester shall describe their qualifications and training in writing, or otherwise able to demonstrate knowledge to PDA for approval. In looking to approve someone as a qualified mushroom identifier we would accept any of the following:

- Taking and passing a comprehensive mushroom identification course(s) which includes; illness information, identification (including hands-on identification), harvesting, best handling practices, regulatory requirements and an exam.

Currently, the Department accepts wild mushroom certifications from the following:

- ✓ Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development
- ✓ Mushroom Mountain, LLC

Other courses may be approved upon review.

- Have a Master's Degree or higher in Mycology.
- Obtain written verification from an already identified mushroom expert that you are competent to identify wild harvested mushrooms proficiently. The mushroom expert must submit their credentials to the Department.

Upon verification of your credentials, you will either receive an approval or a disapproval letter.

Regulatory Requirements

If approved, you may start harvesting and selling edible wild harvested mushrooms in the Commonwealth and you will be subject to the following requirements:

1. Harvesters should keep records with the names of the Food Facilities where wild mushrooms were sold, including dates/species/quantities. In addition, the package/container of mushrooms should have a label/tag stating the following:
 - a. Common name and scientific name of mushroom species
 - b. Name and address (city, state, zip code) of the harvester
 - c. Location/county of harvest
 - d. Dates of harvest
 - e. An accurate net weight

The intent of this requirement is to help establish record-keeping and traceability to assure safety of wild harvested mushrooms.

2. Food Facilities receiving wild mushrooms should keep records with the name and contact information of the person who identified the mushroom and the mushroom seller including invoices with dates/species/quantities. The mushrooms should remain in the container in which they were received and accompanied with a record (tag/label).

The records should be retained for at least 90 days from the date the container is emptied. This retention period accounts for potentially long asymptomatic latent periods (that can be up to 14 days from consumption), diagnosis and investigation timeframes that can be up to 3 weeks, and is consistent with existing records retention timeframes specified in the PA Food Code for other foods. Commingling of wild harvested mushroom lots is not recommended as it serves to confound traceback or foodborne illness investigations and could hinder efforts to remove implicated product from the food chain.

3. Edible wild harvested mushrooms for retail sale shall not be harvested from Federal, State, and local parks and forests. The removal of edible wild mushrooms with the intent of retail sale from federal/state and/or local lands is generally prohibited without obtaining written permission beforehand. Individuals should contact the appropriate local or state authority responsible for management of the public lands to determine if mushroom harvesting is permissible and the permits those authorities may require. Individuals intending to forage/harvest from someone else's property/land should obtain permission in writing from the landowner before removing any edible wild mushrooms with the intent of retail sale.
4. If the post-harvested wild mushrooms are processed by the harvester in any way (i.e. slicing, drying, washing & packaging as ready-to-eat product, etc.), the processing site will be subject to registration and the operation will be placed under inspection by PDA's Bureau of Food Safety and Laboratory Services. Visit our website at www.EatSafaPA.com for information about the registration requirements or contact the Department for assistance.

Approved list of wild mushrooms

The following types of wild harvested mushrooms (mushrooms with tubes, spines and ridges and other mavericks) are considered approved by the Department, since they have clear identification marks and are easily identifiable in the field (fresh state) and there are no potentially poisonous look-a-likes:

- ✓ Hen of the Woods (*grifola frondosa*) – Japanese name is “Maitake”, a cluster of fan shaped overlapping caps.
- ✓ Golden Chanterelle (*cantharellus cibarius*), White Chanterelle (*cantharellus subalbidus*), Blue Chanterelle (*polyozellus multiplex*) – funnel shaped with ridges and cross-veins under cap.
- ✓ Black Trumpet (*cantharellus tubaeformis*) – trumpet shaped with ridges and a hole in the cap center, hollow stem.
- ✓ Hedgehog Fungus (*hydnum repandum*, *dentinum albidum*, *dentinum repandum*, *dentinum umbilicatum*) – matte white to yellow brown with spines under the cap, wavy- edged cap.
- ✓ Common Puffball (*lycoperdon perlatum*) – white conical spines on the cap, net pattern when spines rubbed off, white uniform flesh.
- ✓ Horn of Plenty (*craterellus cornucopioides*) – wavy and out-rolled cap, funnel shaped.
- ✓ Cauliflower Mushroom (*sparassis crispa*) – cauliflower or sea sponge shaped, curved lobes.
- ✓ Chicken of the Woods (*laetiporus sulphureus*) – sulphur yellow to orange, grow in brackets, tubes present.
- ✓ Lion’s Mane or Bear’s Head or Bearded Tooth (*hericium erinaceus*) – spines present with what appears to be hanging, white “fur”.
- ✓ Various bolete species to include: Queen Bolete (*boletus aereus*), King Bolete or Cepe or Porcini (*boletus edulis*), Manzanita Bolete (*leccinum manzanitae*) – brown to red brown and spongy under the cap, no gills present.
- ✓ Matsutake (*armillaria ponderosa*, *tricholoma magnivelare*) – tannish white cap with brown scales.
- ✓ Blewit (*lepista nuda*) – bluish lavender with notched cap and gills.
- ✓ Morels (*morchella spp.*) – sponge, pinecone or honeycomb shape with pits and ridges.
- ✓ Oyster Mushroom (*pleurotus ostreatus*) – white, tan or ivory with short gills connecting to an off-center stem.
- ✓ Shaggy Mane or Lawyer’s Wig (*coprinus comatus*) – long, white cylindrical cap with shaggy, upturned brown scales.
- ✓ Coral Fungi (*clavariaceae*) – appear as branching stems pointing upward like coral.
- ✓ Truffles (*tuber aestivum*, *tuber magnatum*) – black to gray and brown/white, irregular round shape.

Other Points of Emphasis

- Mushroom caps with gills (oyster, shiitake, etc.) should be avoided by beginner harvesters because they can be confused with others in the same group that are seriously poisonous and deadly.
- Wild harvested mushrooms should be thoroughly cooked and never consumed raw.
- Mushrooms should not show any signs of spoilage (rotten, soggy, mushy, slimy, moldy) and/or insect infestation.
- Mushrooms need to breathe and the packaging should have air holes or be made of a breathable material.
- In general, the months of harvest in PA run from early spring to late fall.
- Any other types of wild mushroom species found offered for sale or used in Food Facilities would be out of compliance with the PDA Food Code, Chapter 46, and potentially subject to regulatory action, if found in commerce.

References and Resources

- Schwab, Alexander. *Mushrooming Without Fear: The Beginner's Guide to Collecting Safe and Delicious Mushrooms*. Skyhorse Publishing Inc., 1996.
- Lincoff, Gary. *The Complete Mushroom Hunter: An Illustrated Guide for Finding, Harvesting, and Enjoying Wild Mushrooms*. Quarry Books, 2010.
- Kuo, Michael. *100 Edible Mushrooms*. The University of Michigan Press, 2007.
- National Audubon Society. *Field Guide to Mushrooms of North America*. Chanticleer Press Inc., 1981.
- National Audubon Society. *Field Guide to Trees of Eastern Region North America*. Chanticleer Press Inc., 1980.
- Dr. Kathy Hodge, Cornell University
- Mr. Steve Haas, Haas Shrooms
- North American Mycological Association (NAMA) www.namyco.org
- The American Mushroom Institute (AMI) www.americanmushroom.org
- The International Mycological Association (IMA) www.ima-mycology.org
- VDACs, Field Operations Manual, November 2014