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Morchella spp. — Morels

Richard Robinson, Science Division, Manjimup, richard.robinson@dec.wa.gov.au



Species of *Morchella*, or morels, are distinctive fungi that fruit in the spring. Morels are found throughout the world, and in Europe and North America they are regarded as one of the best species of edible fungi. They are widespread throughout southern and eastern Australia but are not common. In eucalypt forests they sometimes fruit *en mass* a year or two after fire.

The fruit body is distinguished by its longitudinally ridged or reticulated cap that is very variable in shape. Caps are generally light brown to brown and may be round to oval or bluntly conical (*main photo*) or cone-shaped (*inset*). The longitudinal ridges may become dark brown in some species as the fruit body matures. Stems are whitish to buff in colour, generally stout, though not as wide as the caps, and sometimes flattened and grooved. The whole fruit body is generally 5-12cm tall and hollow. The different species are very difficult to distinguish, as each is variable in shape, and for many their DNA needs to be examined to confirm their correct identity. The most common species in Western Australia appears to be *Morchella elata*, the black morel.

The scientific name refers to its popularity as an edible species and its stature (in Europe and North America they can be very large, up to 20cm, or more, tall). *Morchell-*: German term for edible fungus or morel, *elat-*: raised or tall.