

## FUNGI

### Morel



Morel, York. Photo: P. Hussey

The fruiting body of the Morel, *Morchella elata*, has a stout yellowish-white stalk topped by a conical, wrinkled brown cap, overall height 10 - 15 cm. The whole thing is hollow. In WA they occur in forests and woodlands of the south-west.

In Europe and America, Morels are highly regarded as edible fungi, but they are not used much in Australia. There doesn't even seem to be any records of use by Aboriginal people. This lack of interest might be because they are not often noticed, as fruiting bodies seem to be produced in abundance only after bushfires.

After a fire, Morels fruit and release spores which germinate in the soil to form mycelia (feeding threads) and then form sclerotia. Sclerotia are fungal 'resting bodies' up to 5 cm in diameter, composed of large thick-walled cells which enable the fungus to survive adverse conditions. Many south-west fungi form sclerotia, and it has been suggested that it could be a feature that is an adaptation to cope with frequent fires. In spring the sclerotium will either germinate to form a new mycelium or produce a fruiting body. Generally, however, the Morel will not produce a fruiting body until after the next fire.

Morels have a light flavour, and there is nothing much else they could be confused with, if anyone wanted to try them. However, note that some reports from other continents say that, if alcohol is taken at the same meal, severe vomiting and diarrhoea will result!