

Where Can I Hunt Mushrooms?

This is the third most common question that we at the Ohio Mushroom Society receive, right after “What kind of mushroom is this?” and “Can I eat it?”. These are all very good questions, but often the answers are not simple.

Regarding foraging places, OMS volunteers work very hard to establish good relationships with public and private landholding institutions, and private landowners. Some of these relationships take years to mature to the point where we are allowed to conduct a one-time, or even periodic forays, in exchange for the knowledge of species diversity that the landowners gain regarding their properties. This trust can be instantly broken by rogue individuals using these properties as their “own” mushroom spot.

Imagine a motorist with a flat tire stuck in front of your house. Decent human being that you are, you ask if you can help. They have a spare, but no jack and no tools in the trunk. Of course, you open your garage and allow them to borrow yours. Now, how would you feel the next time you are barbecuing in the back yard, hear clanging and rustling in your garage, and after investigating, see the same individual helping themselves to your tools to change their oil?!

So, Rule Number One of mushroom hunting is NO POACHING. Please forage ONLY on properties where you currently have permission.

If you decide to take a risk and poach anyway, you DO NOT have permission from the Ohio Mushroom Society. You DO NOT “know” any of our board members, or previous foray hosts. Can you believe that a couple individuals, when confronted on private property, actually had the nerve to name-drop on an innocent gentleman who gave his personal time to provide an interesting and informative cultivation program to our members?! This type of behavior will get you banned from the OMS.

What’s the harm? There’s plenty for everyone!! I’m not cutting down the “tree”, just harvesting some “fruit”. If you are convinced that your actions are sustainable and that your activities do no harm, then do what we do and approach the landowner honestly and ask for permission. Provide your reasoning. Give them your name and contact information, and sign a waiver if asked.

So where can you hunt mushrooms without asking first? In Ohio, the answers are our State Forests (“State Forest” is part of the property name), the Wayne National Forest, and our State Wildlife Management Areas (“WMA” is part of the property name).

Where can you likely hunt, with advance permission? Our Ohio State Parks (many, but not all, allow hunting, foraging for mushrooms, berry picking, etc.); your local city park; and cemeteries (the older and more derelict the better!). Simply call first.

Collecting mushrooms and other living things is FORBIDDEN in the Cuyahoga Valley National Park; regional park districts (such as Cleveland Metroparks, Lake Metroparks, Summit MetroParks, Geauga Park District, etc.); Ohio State Nature Preserves (“Nature Preserve” is part of the property name); private residential camps and retreat centers (such as Camp Asbury and Boy Scout/Girl Scout camps), private Arboreta (Holden, Dawes, etc.); and University properties (such as Squire Valleevue and Valley Ridge Farms).

Why does it have to be this way? Ohio is 44th in the nation with just 4.2 percent of our land in the public domain; 95.8 percent is all private property. Public land includes highway right-of-ways! So our tiny public properties hosting millions of visitors each year can't possibly sustain all of our wants for free food, free landscaping rocks, free pets, or free flowers. And private landowners have a right to maintain the resources on their properties for themselves or their paying guests/clients/students. They have a right to protect themselves from lawsuits by people falling down their hillside, or drowning in their lakes.

So please, ask first. Help us keep OMS a respected organization. When we all act to keep our actions sustainable, we will continue to be welcomed. Thanks!!

by Debra Shankland, OMS president
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