

Nature Week at Heritage Village - May 17th

Non-flowering plants

Sexual reproduction, the recombination of half of a father's genes with half of the mother's, occurs in both flowering plants and the non-flowering plants such as ferns, fungus, mosses . . .

In flowering plants the male pollen is carried by wind or insects to fertilize the female portion and the combined genetic material results in a seed containing a nascent plant. Non-flowering plants, on the other hand, produce spores. These single-cells each carry half of the parent's genetic material. They are released by the millions, find damp ground, grow into the thread-like fungus we find when turning the soil. Each filament carries only one set of genetic material. These filaments grow randomly until two bump into each other and combine their genes. This combination has the potential to make a new fruiting body that we call a mushroom. This week the weather has been right and mushrooms are popping from the ground while spores are blowing.

Morels - the mushroom popping

Besides being tasty and fairly easy to identify, one of the attractions of morels is their elusive behavior. Finding morels is the ultimate scavenger hunt, making a great family outing. They prefer poor soil near a rich nutrient source and are most common on land that burned the prior summer. Last year 550 acres burned in the U.P. so there should be many morels.

Does the morel pop up overnight? Yes and no. When conditions are right for a mushroom to appear, it begins development as a knob of cells right at ground level. This unobtrusive knob grows by creating small new cells - the plant remains hidden during this stage that takes a week or so. When all of the mushroom's cells have been produced then the **elongation** process begins. The cells engorge water, elongate, and indeed, overnight the mushroom can pop out of the ground. Enjoy the mushroom hunting!

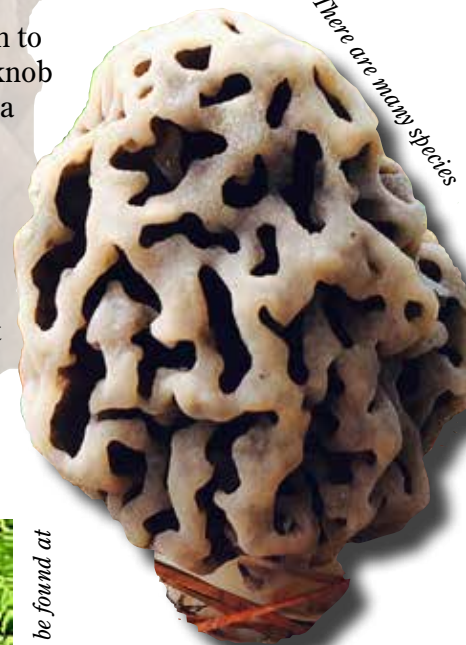
Ostrich Fern - the spores spreading

This beautiful woodland fern sprouts summer leaves that resemble ostrich plumes. What we see in the spring are specialized fronds that contain brown curled leaves covering aggregations of spores. This week the spores were being released. Brush against one of these fronds and set up a dust storm of brown spores. Soon the fiddle-heads, new green fronds, will appear and these are sometimes cooked as a vegetable.

Flowering plants

About 15 species of flowering plants are blooming in the various habitats of the Heritage Village now. Let it be known that the beautiful trillium is in bloom, the obscure

bearberry, and the common dandelion. Come out and look for the various species.



Detailed directions for raising your own morels can be found at <http://www.thefarm.org/mushroom/morel.html>



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by Sandy Planisek 2015
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