

Shiitake Mushroom

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SHIITAKE

Fragrant Mushroom a Symbol of Longevity in Asia

By Pat Crocker

Shiitake mushrooms are amber to brown in colour, medium in size and have tough, woody stems topped by slightly convex-shaped caps (thin, sunken flat caps indicate mushrooms that, while still edible, are past their peak). Popular western varieties have white dots on the caps.

"We have a standing order for the hardwood starters from a local producer. We then provide the perfect conditions for optimum fungus growth," she says. Shenk has the growing of this delectable down to a science: "With the right moisture, heat and carbon dioxide, I can be sure of delivering fresh, plump, earthy-tasting mushrooms to my regular restaurant customers every week." Sounds great for those fortunate enough to visit one of Suzanne's restaurants, but for food lovers who seek their rich and smoky flavour for favourite recipes, finding high quality shiitake mushrooms may require some effort.

Shining the Light on Shiitakes

One thing is certain: demand creates abundance when it comes to supermarket shelves. If you want to see more local produce, start a conversation with your supermarket's produce manager and ask for local shiitake mushrooms. Seek out local growers at the St. Lawrence Market and get there early to take home the best of their crops. Generally speaking, shiitakes can currently be found fresh in the larger health food stores and some supermarkets such as Loblaws.



Like all produce, shiitake mushrooms are best eaten fresh. Local shiitake mushrooms may be refrigerated for 2 to 3 days if stored in a loosely covered paper bag. Before cooking, fill a sink with cool water to which a drop of biodegradable soap has been added. Grasp the mushrooms by the stem and swish the caps gently in the water for a few seconds only. Dry on clean towels. Trim stems and discard.

This mushroom soup is nothing like the canned version. It is brown and brothy, full of the earthy mushroom essence.

(Serves 4)

- 1/2 lb shiitake mushrooms
- 1 leek, white and tender green parts, sliced
- 1 cup chopped onion
- 1 clove garlic, finely chopped
- 2 Tbsp olive oil
- 3 cups vegetable stock, divided
- 1 Tbsp maple syrup
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 cup coconut, rice or soy milk, optional

1. Clean caps, trim and discard tough stems. Pat dry, slice and set aside.
2. In a large saucepan or soup pot, combine leek, onion, garlic and oil. Sauté over medium heat for about 10 minutes or until very soft. Add mushrooms and 1/2 cup stock. Bring to a light boil. Cover, reduce heat and simmer for 15 minutes.
3. Add remaining 2-1/2 cups stock, maple syrup and salt. Bring to a boil. Cover, reduce heat and simmer for 30 minutes to 1 hour. Using a slotted spoon, lift out one half of the vegetables, put in a food processor or blender and process for 30 seconds until smooth, and pour into a medium bowl. Process second batch. Keep cooking liquids in the pan hot over low heat.
4. Return purée to the pan and stir well. Taste and add more salt if required. Add milk if using. Heat through and serve immediately.

Udon Noodle Soup with Shiitake Mushrooms and Bok Choy

*Ginger warms this healing and delicious soup.
(Serves 4)*

8 oz fresh udon noodles
2 quarts water
6 oz fresh shiitake mushrooms
4 green onions, sliced on the diagonal
3 Tbsp freshly squeezed lemon juice
3 Tbsp tamari or soy sauce
2 tsp toasted sesame oil
4 cups vegetable stock, divided
1 Tbsp grated fresh ginger
1 bunch Bok Choy, greens only, washed and shredded

1. In a large colander, rinse dry noodles. In a medium or large saucepan, bring water to a boil over high heat. Add noodles and cook for about 3 minutes or until soft. Drain and rinse in cold water. Set aside.
2. Wash, remove and discard stems of mushrooms. Pat dry and slice thin. Transfer to a medium saucepan. Add green onions, lemon juice, tamari, oil and 1/4 cup of the stock. Bring to a light boil over medium heat. Reduce heat and simmer gently for 10 minutes or until mushrooms are tender.
3. Add the remaining 3-3/4 cups stock, ginger, Bok Choy and noodles. Simmer for 1 minute or until the Bok Choy is wilted and noodles are heated through. Remove from the heat and ladle into soup bowls. Serve immediately.

Leek and Mushroom Pilaf

Short-grain Italian arborio rice works best for this recipe. Brown rice does not take up the stock in the same way. The goodness in the mushrooms and broth are enough to make up for the polished grain. (Serves 6)

Heated serving bowl
1 leek, white and green parts, sliced
2 cups coarsely chopped shiitake mushroom caps
3 Tbsp white or red wine
1 Tbsp olive oil
2 Tbsp fresh thyme leaves
1 cup arborio rice, rinsed
1 head roasted garlic
2 cups Mushroom Stock (see above) or vegetable stock, divided
1/2 cup freshly grated Parmesan Cheese

1. In a large skillet, combine leek, mushrooms, wine and oil. Gently simmer over medium heat for 5 minutes. Stir in thyme and rice. Cook for another 3 minutes, stirring constantly.

2. Stir in 1/2 cup of the stock and squeeze roasted garlic cloves into the rice mixture. Increase heat to high, bring to a boil and stir up any browned bits in the skillet. Add the remaining 1-1/2 cups stock, cover and bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer for 20 minutes or until rice is tender and mixture is creamy. Transfer to heated serving bowl. Sprinkle cheese over top and serve immediately.
Vegan Version: Omit Parmesan cheese.

Stir-Fried Vegetables with Bulgur

This is a spectacular weekday dinner. Complete in itself, it is ready in less than half an hour. When local fresh beans and asparagus are out of season, use broccoli and carrots instead. (Serves 4)

Heated serving platter
3/4 cup bulgur or couscous
1-1/2 cups boiling water
2 Tbsp olive oil
1/2 cup chopped onion
1/2 cup chopped red bell pepper
2 cloves garlic, minced
2 cups sliced shiitake mushroom caps
1/2 lb green beans cut in 1-inch (2.5 cm) pieces
1/2 lb asparagus cut in 1-inch (2.5 cm) pieces
1 cup fresh peas
3/4 cup Ginger Citrus Sauce (below)

1. In a small bowl, pour boiling water over bulgur. Cover and set aside. Fluff with a fork just before serving.
2. Meanwhile, in a wok or large skillet, heat oil over medium-high heat. Add onion and pepper, cook for 3 minutes, stirring constantly. Add garlic, mushrooms, beans and asparagus. Cook, stirring for 3 to 5 minutes or until beans are crisp-tender.
3. Stir in peas and Ginger Citrus Sauce. Reduce heat and simmer for 3 minutes or until sauce is slightly thickened. Transfer bulgur to serving platter. Spoon vegetables and sauce over and serve immediately.

Ginger Citrus Sauce

Easy to make, this sauce enlivens stir-fried vegetables as in the recipe above, but also makes a flavorful dipping sauce and sauce for steamed vegetables and greens.

Make 3/4 cup (175 mL)
1 piece (1-inch/2.5 cm) fresh ginger, peeled
1 small jalapeno pepper, seeded and quartered 1
1 lemongrass stalk, tops and outer leaves removed, coarsely chopped
1-1/3 cup freshly squeezed orange juice (75 mL)
3 Tbsp freshly squeezed lemon juice (45 mL)
1 Tbsp rice vinegar (15 mL)
1 Tbsp tamari or soy sauce (15 mL)
2 Tbsp peanut butter (25 mL)
2 Tbsp finely chopped fresh basil (25 mL)
Salt and pepper

In a small food processor or blender, chop ginger, pepper and lemongrass. With motor running, add orange juice, lemon juice, vinegar and tamari through opening in lid, process 10 seconds. Stop and add peanut butter, process 10 seconds or until sauce is smooth.

2. Scrape into a small bowl, stir in basil, taste, add salt and pepper and adjust other seasonings as required. Cover tightly and set aside until required. Sauce may be made ahead and refrigerated, tightly covered, for up to 3 days. Bring to room temperature before using in recipes.

Country Vegetable Pâté

Serve on whole grain toast with a salad as a light lunch or on seasonal greens as an appetizer. (Serves 6)

Preheat oven to 400° F (200° C)

Lightly oiled baking sheet

15 small shiitake mushrooms, cleaned

6 cloves garlic, peeled and left whole

1 onion, peeled and quartered

1 leek, white and tender green parts, washed and cut into large chunks

1 zucchini, trimmed and cut into large chunks

1 eggplant, trimmed and cut into large chunks

2 Tbsp olive oil

1 tsp salt

1/2 cup dulse (dried seaweed)

1/2 cup chopped toasted pecans

1/2 cup cooked brown rice

1/2 cup whole wheat breadcrumbs

2 Tbsp fresh thyme leaves

1. Remove and discard mushroom stems. In a large bowl, toss mushrooms, garlic, onion, leek, zucchini and eggplant with oil. Spread onto prepared baking sheet, sprinkle with salt. Roast in preheated oven for 40 minutes or until tender and browned. Stir once or twice, removing vegetables as they are done. (The smaller vegetables will cook faster than the large ones.)

2. Meanwhile, in a small bowl, cover dulse with hot water. Let stand 5 minutes. Drain, pressing lightly and reserving soaking liquid.

3. In a food processor or blender, combine roasted vegetables, dulse, pecans, rice, breadcrumbs and thyme. Pulse on and off until well mixed and chunky. If too dry to hold together, add a little reserved dulse soaking liquid until the consistency is right for spreading. Pack into a serving dish, cover tightly and chill before serving.

Store: Cover tightly and keep in the refrigerator up to 3 days.

Resources

- www.mushrooms.ca – A Canadian site with excellent information on health and wellness related to mushrooms and a very good recipe section.

- www.whfoods.com/genpage.php?tname=foodspice&dbid=122

An excellent resource site for information on healthy foods, it gives the health benefits, safety and nutrition profiles of many whole foods.

- Acton, Johnny and Nick Sandler, *Mushroom*. Great Britain: Kyle Cathie Ltd., 2001.

- Crocker, Pat, *The Vegetarian Cook's Bible*. Toronto: Robert Rose Inc., 2007.

- Leibenstein, Margaret, *The Edible Mushroom, A Gourmet Cook's Guide*. U.S.A.: Ballantine Books, 1986.

- Suzanne Shenk's Mushroom Farm – Fresh shiitake mushrooms available all year. Route 1, Neustadt ON, #241729 West Grey Township, NOG 2M0

Fresh 'shrumes' are a year long pursuit for Pat Crocker. Spring might find her tramping fields for the giant puffball, and she has enjoyed, first-hand, the hunt for France's famous truffles. "I think that eating shiitake mushrooms is a delicious way to keep our bodies healthy," she muses. Pat is a Culinary Herbalist, photographer, writer, and lecturer. Author of several award-winning books, Pat's latest book, The Vegetarian Cook's Bible, is available in bookstores now. Other books include The Healing Herbs Cookbook, The Juicing Bible and The Smoothies Bible, all available at bookstores throughout Canada and the United States. Email: pcrocker@riversongherbals.com. Website: www.riversongherbals.com

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