

REDISCOVER MUSHROOMS

Curious to explore beyond the basic button mushroom?

Good idea—here's why mushrooms deserve their own distinct spot in a healthy diet.



Low in calories and carbohydrates yet loaded with valuable nutrients including disease-fighting antioxidants, mushrooms are definitely worth getting to know better, especially if you're looking for ways to enjoy more meatless meals. Their dense texture and earthy flavor make them a suitable stand-in for many types of animal proteins.

However, given their versatility in so many dishes, it may surprise you to know that mushrooms aren't technically considered either a fruit or a vegetable. Mushrooms don't grow from plants, but rather spring to life on trees and soil thanks to spore colonies. Here's a quick rundown on what you need to know about the many delicious varieties of these edible, quick-growing fungi:

BUTTON

These basic white mushrooms are widely available and work well in many recipes. For best results, make sure they're white with no dark or soft spots. Store them in a paper bag for best results and use within 3 days of purchase.



CHANTERELLE

While pricey, chanterelles are highly prized because of their golden color and heady, peppery flavor. You should always cook these mushrooms to make the most of their meaty texture.



CREMINI

You may find these popular brown mushrooms labeled "baby bellas" because they're smaller versions of the large portobello mushrooms commonly found in most markets, but that's just a marketing ploy. They are also button mushrooms that have been allowed to mature longer before harvest. They have a more intense flavor than white button mushrooms and work well in most dishes.



HEN OF THE WOODS

Also known as maitake in Chinese and Japanese cuisine, the delicate fronds of this mushroom help hold on to the flavors of other seasonings during cooking.



MORELS

If you are put off by the texture of cooked mushrooms, you may find morels to be more to your liking. They have a deep earthy, nutty flavor and boast a delicious meaty texture.



PORCINI

Used in classic French and Italian cooking, fresh porcini is most likely to be available in late summer and early fall. They can vary in size and shape, but porcini generally have a thick stem and an umbrella-shaped cap.



PORTOBELLO

Growing sometimes 4" to 5" in diameter, portobello mushroom caps can be grilled or baked into all kinds of easy meatless meals. Try them in place of a burger at your next cookout or fill them with your favorite pizza toppings and pop them in the oven for a delicious gluten-free alternative to a regular pizza.



SHIITAKE

Native to Asia, this mushroom is well-studied for its nutritional benefits and works well in a variety of stir-fries, soups, and stews. Fresh shiitake is more flavorful, but dried forms of this popular mushroom are usually more widely available.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT MUSHROOMS

• Are wild mushrooms safe to eat?

It can be tempting to think of foraging for expensive gourmet varieties on your own, but unless you're accompanied by a trained mushroom expert, stick to your local grocery or farmers' market. Some wild mushrooms are quite toxic, and it's not worth the risk.

• How do I clean fresh mushrooms?

Use a dry brush or slightly damp paper towel to clean the mushrooms before cooking. Because of their high water content, mushrooms should be dry to get that rich, caramelized flavor that cooks prize.

• Are dried mushrooms a good option?

Dried mushrooms are an excellent choice for many gourmet varieties that are difficult to grow or have a brief growing season. Plus, they'll keep for up to a year until you're ready to use them. Simply soak in water for about half an hour until soft (thick mushrooms may take slightly longer), then rinse and pat dry before proceeding with the recipe. Make sure to strain and reserve the soaking liquid—it's packed with flavor!