

# *Lincoln County Homemakers' News and Clues*

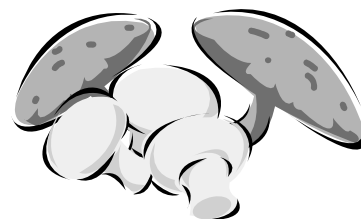
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## ***The Lowly Mushroom***

I admit it— mushrooms have never been my favorite food. September, though, is **National Mushroom Month**, so come with me as I discover more about this *lowly* vegetable!



Often grouped with vegetables, mushrooms provide many of the nutritional attributes more commonly found in meat, beans and grains. Mushrooms are low in calories, fat-free, cholesterol-free and very low in sodium, yet they provide several important nutrients. Mushrooms are the only natural fresh vegetable or fruit that contains vitamin D. A serving of mushrooms provides 9percent of the Recommended Daily Value of potassium, an important mineral that aids in the maintenance of normal fluid and mineral balance, helps control blood pressure, and plays a role in making sure nerves and muscles, including the heart, function properly. Mushrooms are also a good source of the B vitamins riboflavin (B<sub>2</sub>), niacin (B<sub>3</sub>) and pantothenic acid (B<sub>5</sub>), which help break down proteins, fats and carbohydrates so they can be used for energy.

According to hieroglyphics dating 4600 years ago, ancient Egyptians believed mushrooms could provide immortality. Their delicious flavor intrigued the pharaohs of Egypt so much that they decreed mushrooms were food for royalty and that no commoner should ever touch them. The ancient Romans fed mushrooms only to their warriors because they believed mushrooms gave them god-like strength. In other civilizations throughout the world, including Russia, China, Greece, Mexico and Latin America, it was believed that mushrooms had properties that could help in finding lost objects and lead the soul to the realm of the gods.

France became the leader in the formal cultivation of mushrooms where they were grown in special caves near Paris set aside for this unique form of agriculture. From France, the gardeners of England found mushrooms a very easy crop to grow because they required little labor, investment and space. Mushroom production made its way across the Atlantic to the United States with the first mushroom farm starting in America in 1896 in Kennett Square, Pennsylvania. In 1930, U.S. Census Bureau data showed there were 516 mushroom growers in the U.S. with 350 in Pennsylvania alone! Today, mushrooms are commercially produced in virtually every state.



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Mushrooms grow from microscopic spores, not seeds, and come in many colors, shapes and sizes. As a matter of fact, there are 38,000 different varieties of mushrooms! Several of the more common varieties are:

- *White button* which are the most popular mushroom, accounting for 90 percent of mushrooms consumed in the United States. They have a fairly mild taste and blend well with almost anything. Their flavor intensifies when cooked. They can be sautéed or cooked any way or enjoyed raw in salads.



- *Criminis* - also known as “baby 'bellas” or “browns,” have a light-tan to rich-brown cap. They have a firmer texture and a deeper, earthier flavor than whites. Their hearty, full-bodied taste makes them an excellent addition to beef, wild game, and vegetable dishes.



- *Portabellas* have tan or brown caps and measure up to 6 inches in diameter. They have a deep, meat-like texture and flavor and can be grilled, broiled or roasted and served as appetizers, entrees or side dishes. Their hearty taste and texture makes them a flavorful vegetarian alternative.



- *Maitake*, also called “Hen of the Woods,” appear rippling and fan-shaped, without caps. They have a distinctive aroma and a rich, woody taste. For a richer taste in any recipe calling for mushrooms, use maitakes.



- *Shiitakes* are tan to dark brown and have broad, umbrella-shaped caps, wide open veils, tan gills and curved stems that should be removed before cooking. They have a meaty texture and add a rich woody flavor when cooked in stir-fry, pastas, soups, entrees and sides.



- *Enoki* with tiny, button-shaped caps and long, spindly stems are mild tasting and crunchy. Before using, roots should be trimmed at the cluster base and separate stems before serving. Try these mushrooms raw in salads and sandwiches or use them as an ingredient in soups, such as a stock made with soy sauce and tofu.



- *Oysters* can be gray, pale yellow or even blue. They have a velvety texture and a very delicate flavor. Try them over linguine with sliced steak and red peppers, sprinkled with grated parmesan cheese.



- *Beech* are petite mushrooms with either all-white or light-brown caps and have a crunchy texture offering a delicately mild flavor that is sweet and deliciously nutty. Cook whole or slice into sauces to compliment chicken or fish dishes but they are also great with vegetables and in stir-fry. To maintain their crisp texture, add them as the last ingredient to soups, stews or sauces.



- *Wild* - Some mushroom lovers enjoy searching the woods for prized wild varieties of mushrooms, such as morels, truffles and chanterelles. Because there are thousands of varieties of inedible and poisonous mushrooms, it's important to never eat wild mushrooms without the guidance of a trained mycologist, or mushroom expert. Poisonous mushrooms often resemble non-poisonous mushrooms, so it's best to purchase commercially-grown mushrooms from a trusted retailer or served in a restaurant.



### Selecting mushrooms:

Purchase mushrooms that are firm with a fresh, smooth appearance. Surfaces should be dry, but not dried out, and should appear plump. A closed veil under the cap indicates a delicate flavor, while an open veil and exposed gills indicate a richer flavor.



### Storing mushrooms:

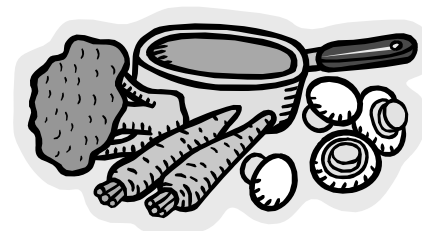
Mushrooms should be kept in their original packaging until ready to use and will keep for up to a week in the refrigerator. Once opened, mushrooms should be stored in a porous paper bag for a prolonged shelf-life. Avoid storing in airtight containers which cause condensation and quickens spoilage. Fresh mushrooms should never be frozen, but sautéed mushrooms will keep in the freezer for up to one month.

### Cleaning mushrooms:

Use your fingers or a damp paper towel to brush off any dirt then rinse fresh mushrooms only briefly under running water and pat dry with a paper towel. Never soak them, as they absorb moisture. Trim the end of the stem before using.

### Cooking Mushrooms:

- **Sautéing** is an easy way to cook whole, sliced, chopped or halved mushrooms. Brush pan with oil or butter and heat on high. Add a single layer of mushrooms and turn once when mushrooms become red-brown on one side. Cook until the other side turns the same color, remove from heat and season to taste.
- **Grilling or broiling** is preferable for larger-capped mushrooms, like Portabellas and shiitakes. Lightly brush caps and stems with oil to keep them moist and season with salt and pepper. Grill or broil 4 to 6 inches from heat source for 4 to 6 minutes on each side, brushing once or twice with oil or try your favorite dressing or sauce instead of oil.
- **Roasting** - Preheat oven to 450 degrees, brush mushrooms with oil (use about one tablespoon of oil for each eight ounces of mushrooms), and place on a shallow baking pan. Stir occasionally until brown, about 20 minutes.
- **Microwaving** - Place eight ounces of thickly-sliced mushrooms in a microwaveable bowl (no oil or butter needed), cover and cook on high for two to three minutes, stirring once.



As we have learned, mushrooms are far from *lowly*! From the caves of Paris to the dinner tables of millions of Americans, fresh mushrooms have come out of the dark and into the spotlight. Let's go enjoy some of *Nature's Hidden Treasures*! (See a delicious recipe on the back!)

*Sincerely,*

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University of Arkansas, United States Department of Agriculture and County Governments Cooperating.

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## *Sautéed Mushroom Salad*

Yield: 4 portions

### **Ingredients:**

8 cups	Spring mix (assorted baby salad greens)
1 Tablespoon	Olive oil
1 lb	White button or Crimini mushrooms – trimmed and quartered
1 cup	Shallot or green onion - thinly sliced
1 cup	Red pepper - diced
1 teaspoon	Garlic – minced
1 Tablespoon	Red wine vinegar
1 teaspoon	Sugar
½ teaspoon	Salt
1 teaspoon	Black pepper - freshly ground
2 Tablespoons	Chives - fresh, minced



### **Directions:**

Divide spring mix among 4 serving plates and set aside.

Heat oil in a large non-stick skillet over medium-high heat. Add single layer of mushrooms and cook, without stirring, for about 5 minutes or until mushrooms become red-brown on one side.

Turn the mushrooms and stir in shallot or onion, red pepper and garlic. Cook for 5 minutes or until shallot or onions begin to soften.

Remove from heat and transfer to a separate bowl. Stir in vinegar, sugar, salt and pepper. Mix until sugar is dissolved.

Spoon mushroom mixture on top of greens and scatter fresh chives on top. Serve immediately.

*(Courtesy of the Mushroom Council and mushroominfo.com)*

Per Serving: Calories – 100      Fat - 4g      (Saturated Fat - 0.5g      Trans Fat - 0g)  
Carbohydrates – 13g      Protein - 5g