

## Seasonal Eating Whitney Danhof, Extension Agent

Mushrooms Star as Main Characters  
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Enoki, shiitake, portobello, crimini – do these sound like the characters from a science fiction comic book? Actually, they are from the wonderful world of mushrooms and the main characters for delicious, earthy dishes in the kitchen. While mushrooms play a supporting role in many dishes, they can also shine on their own.

The first challenge is to pick the right star for the job. For a mild flavor and more tender texture, choose the white button mushrooms that are probably the most familiar as well. These work really well for adding raw slices to a salad, simmering in a sauce or stuffing with flavorful ingredients.

For a little heartier flavor and firmer texture, try the crimini mushrooms. These look like the white button mushrooms only tan in color. Crimini mushrooms work well sautéed in a little butter for a side dish.



Portobello mushrooms are the mature versions of crimini. These are great for grilling since they are large and flat. Their meaty texture makes a great burger, replacing the beef patty on a bun. They can be used as a base for toppings like pizza sauce, cooked sausage and mozzarella cheese or scrambled eggs and Cheddar cheese or mashed potatoes and gravy. Remove the tough stems from the caps and some people like to scrape out the gills underneath, although this is not essential.

Shiitake mushrooms have a more distinct earthy flavor and meatier texture. Found fresh or dried, they are often used in Asian soups and make great broth or grilled mushrooms. Be sure to remove the woody stem. When soaking dried mushrooms, strain the liquid before using in a dish to remove any grit.

Enoki mushrooms are the tall, slender, small capped white ones that usually come in a clump. These work best when used raw as in sprinkled over a salad or used to garnish a soup.

When sautéing mushrooms, there are three keys. One is to use high heat, another is to not overcrowd the pan and the final is to cook them long enough to brown nicely. After you add the mushrooms to a hot pan, they will start to release their juices. When all of the juices are released and evaporated, the mushrooms should be caramelized until brown on the outside for that steakhouse flavor.

You can also roast mushrooms in the oven at 400 degrees, tossed with a little olive oil and stirred occasionally until browned, about 20 minutes or so. If making stuffed mushrooms, cut off the stem and scrape out the gills to make a well in the center (you can use the stems and trimmings in the filling if you like). Dip the mushrooms in oil and place about 1" apart on a baking sheet. Sprinkle with salt and pepper. Fill with your stuffing of choice and place in a 425 degree oven on the lowest shelf for 10-12 minutes.

This recipe for Mushroom Ragout sautés the mushrooms with butter and thyme and then adds a little white wine and heavy cream to form a slight sauce. A ragout is a French term for a thick, rich meat stew. Here we've replaced the meat with mushrooms for a satisfying and flavorful topping for pasta, roasted beef or steaks. I like to cook a pasta like fettuccini and toss it with the ragout and top with parmesan cheese. Add slices of cooked chicken breast or cooked shrimp if you desire. For more ideas on using mushrooms and herbs, a Seasonal Eating cooking demonstration will be held on Wednesday at 12:00 noon at the Extension Office. Call 684-5971 for more information or to register by Monday afternoon and bring \$5 to class.

#### Mushroom Ragout

- 8 ounces white button and/or crimini mushrooms
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 1/4 onion, chopped
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/8 teaspoon black pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon fresh thyme leaves
- 2 tablespoons white wine
- 3 tablespoons heavy cream

Wipe any dirt off the mushrooms with a paper towel. Coarsely chop the mushrooms. Melt 1 tablespoon of the butter in a skillet. Add the mushrooms and cook until browned and the liquid is evaporated. Add the other tablespoon of butter, onion, salt, pepper and thyme. Cook until onion is tender, about 5 minutes. Remove from heat and add wine, scraping up any browned bits from the bottom of the pan. Add the cream and place back on heat. Bring to a boil. Serve over pasta, roasted beef or steaks.