



TOP LEFT Soft textured 'Nameko' have a sticky orange cap that protects them in the wild from frost. RIGHT Jacky harvesting cultivated 'Eryngii' mushrooms, which project through a plastic bag encasement. BELOW LEFT (top to bottom, left to right) 'Brown Shimeji', 'Nameko', 'Eryngii', 'White Shimeji', 'Shiitake' and 'Grey Oyster'.



Mushrooms

Explore the weird and wonderful world of edible fungi - whether you choose to forage in the wild or cultivate a crop at home, the result will be delicious

PHOTOGRAPHS MICHELLE GARRETT WORDS JACKY HOBBS

There are thousands of different species of fungi, or mushrooms, growing largely on forest floors and woodland areas of Britain and other temperate countries. Of these, only a small proportion is edible, a few are poisonous and several deadly! So, while it's a lovely idea to pick wild mushrooms, you should only forage with a trusted expert. You may be fortunate and come across varieties such as 'Cep', 'Trompette de la Mort', 'Chanterelle' or 'Girolle', which are usually only found in the wild, but there are many other delicious mushrooms that can be cultivated safely, either commercially or at home.

There are two basic types of edible fungi: field mushrooms and forest mushrooms. Both are delicious. Field mushrooms are a rarity growing in the fields of Britain, because fertiliser and fungicide have wiped out much of the wild stock. They come in an array of sizes and shapes including buttons, flats and caps. Popular varieties are chestnut and 'Portabella'. For a meal on its own, try 'Portabella', which is impressively large when mature, with white flesh, an intense earthy flavour and an almost meaty texture. Small button and chestnut mushrooms are at the other end of the scale; they have a mild, woody flavour, which intensifies on cooking.

Field mushrooms are widely available in the shops and commonly used in our kitchens. They are cultivated commercially, as well as at home, by mimicking the conditions in which they would grow in the



Recipe 1 Mushroom & chestnut Wellington

Serves 6

- 30g butter
- 1 onion, chopped.
- 1 clove garlic, crushed
- 300g mixed mushrooms
- 200g cooked chestnuts (packet or tinned), chopped
- 100g Brazil nuts, chopped
- 30g fresh breadcrumbs
- 1 tsp fresh mixed herbs, chopped (thyme, parsley etc)
- 1 tbsp poppy seeds, plus extra for the top
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 350g puff pastry
- Salt and pepper

● **Pre-heat oven** to 200°C.

● **Melt butter in pan**, soften garlic and onion, add mushrooms and herbs. Cook until juices evaporate.

● **Cool then blend** roughly and mix with nuts, breadcrumbs, poppy seeds and one egg. Season.

● **Roll out pastry** to a rectangle and place filling down the middle, leaving enough pastry to wrap over. Cut pastry edges into 3cm strips and fold over, alternating sides, to make a pastry plait.

● **Brush with egg**, sprinkle with poppy seeds and place on a lined baking tray. Cook for 20 mins, reducing to 175°C for a further 10 mins or until golden. Serve hot.

Recipe 2 Grilled 'Portabella' mushrooms

Serves 4

- 4 'Portabella' mushrooms
- 25g butter
- 1 clove garlic, crushed

● **Pre-heat oven** to 180°C.

● **Melt butter in a pan** and add garlic, cooking until soft.

● **Place upturned mushrooms**, stalks removed, in an ovenproof dish. Spoon in melted garlic butter.

● **Cook for 15 mins** or until tender. Serve hot.

Expert Advice

GROWING TIPS FROM JANE DICK OF FUNDAMENTALLY FUNGUS

FIELD MUSHROOMS

- **Place the spore-loaded soil**, usually in a moisture-retentive container, in a warm environment (20-25°C) for a few days. The surface will white over with fungus.
- **Add a layer of cover or poor soil**, which the fungus grows through and again covers the surface with white fungus.
- **Drop the temperature** to 15-18°C, making sure soil remains damp, to stimulate fungal growth.
- **Continue to water** until mushrooms reach harvesting size.

FOREST MUSHROOMS

- **Use fungal-impregnated wood** available as a kit. Keep in the breathable bag it comes in for a few weeks at 20-25°C in a humid environment high in carbon dioxide (achieved by wrapping in plastic).
- **To shock them into growth**, let in oxygen by slashing, but not removing, the plastic bag. Reduce temperature to 10-15°C, according to the variety, emulating chilly autumn nights. This triggers the fungus into producing pins, which are the tiny mushroom buds.
- **Maintain temperature and humidity** and mushrooms will develop. This spans several weeks for each successive crop.



ABOVE Jane Dick, director of Fundamentally Fungus, slits the plastic surrounding an impregnated wood substrate block to allow oxygen to the fungi. This triggers growth. **BELOW LEFT** Unusual 'Amethyst Deceivers' grow in the wild, but should only be picked with expert advice.

wild by providing the relevant stimulant or trigger for growth. Field mushrooms are grown in soil that is rich in animal manure, duplicating pastureland conditions. You can buy growing kits with enriched soil, prepared with the appropriate fungal spores. To stimulate mushrooms into growth, you need to shock them into action by altering humidity and changing the temperature.

Forest varieties may be picked from the wild or cultivated. Cultivated ones come in an array of shapes, sizes, colours and flavours. These include 'Oyster', fan-shaped mushrooms in grey or yellow; 'Wood Blewit', which has a deep, intense flavour making it ideal for heavy meat or wine-based dishes; 'Enoki', small pin-head mushrooms, that can be eaten raw or cooked, and are often used in Asian dishes; and 'Shiitake', a popular variety famed for its plump figure and intense flavour, as well as being acclaimed as an immune system stimulant.

In the wild, forest mushrooms grow on trees or dead wood, so you need the relevant spores impregnated in a woody substrate to grow them at home. It's crucial to follow growing kit instructions precisely. Growing forest mushrooms is more of an art than a science. For me, the key to success was recognising the need to use shock tactics to trigger growth by changing the environment in which they are grown. It's also important to maintain humidity. It's a myth you should keep them in the dark.

Once you've cracked the method of mushroom growing, pests and diseases seem less significant. Slugs and fruit flies have a habit of being ever-present and, due to the humid situation, mould can be problematic and should be cut away and cleared.

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Where to buy and how to find

Mushroom growing kits:

- **Complete windowsill** mushroom-growing kits are available in five varieties, priced from £9.99, from Suttons. Tel: 0844 9220606. www.suttons.co.uk
- **Gourmet mushrooms** can be grown on logs or old paperback books with kits from £8.95. Or attend an introductory course about cultivation using logs and stumps, £120 for a day. Gourmet Woodland Mushrooms, Beacon Hill, Welwick, Hull HU12 0SL. Tel: +44 (0)5602 122543. www.gourmetmushrooms.co.uk

Organised forays:

- **Fungi Foray Workshops** in Dorset, which are led by an expert and include identification and fireside cooking, cost £55 for a day. Bushcraft Expeditions, tel: +44 (0)1432 356700. www.bushcraftexpeditions.com
- **In and around London** regular fungi workshops and forays are organised. Tel: +44 (0)20 8458 0652. www.fungitobewith.org

Fresh mushrooms:

- **Fundamentally Fungus** offers a wide range of cultivated, organically grown mushrooms. Many of the more unusual forest mushrooms are produced in specialised growing rooms. Among varieties available are 'Nameko', 'Velvet Caps' and 'Shimeji'. The company delivers throughout the UK, no matter how small the order. Tel: 0800 9804784. www.fundamentallyfungus.com

Recipe 3 Mushroom pâté

Serves 4

- 2 shallots, chopped
- 1 clove garlic, crushed
- 15g butter
- 200g field mushrooms, chestnut, 'Portabella' or a mix, chopped
- 1 tbsp white wine
- 75g crème fraîche
- 100g cream cheese
- Salt and pepper
- **Soften the shallots** and garlic in a frying pan with the butter.
- **Add mushrooms and season**; cook until tender.
- **Add the wine** and cook until liquid has evaporated.
- **Leave to cool** completely.
- **Coarsely blend** in food processor before stirring in crème fraîche and cream cheese.
- **Place in a serving bowl** or individual pots and chill before serving.





Recipe 4 Mushroom & raisin medley

Serves 6-8 as an accompaniment

- 2 shallots, diced
- 2 cloves garlic, crushed
- 50ml olive oil
- 500g mixed mushrooms, chopped or sliced
- 50g raisins
- 25ml apple cider or white wine vinegar
- 2 tbsp honey

- **Soften the garlic** and shallots in a pan with the oil.
- **Add the mushrooms** and cook over a gentle heat until softened.
- **Tip in the raisins** and add the vinegar or cider and bubble for a moment or two before stirring in the honey.
- **Allow to imbue** for a further couple of minutes.
- **Take off the heat** and let cool.
- **Serve with cold meats** and cheeses or as a side to a meat or poultry dish.

Recipe 5 Mixed mushroom fricassée

Serves 4

- 30g butter
- 2 shallots, chopped
- 500g mixed mushrooms (forest or field)
- Squeeze of lemon juice
- Salt and pepper

For the sauce

- 50ml water
- 1 tbsp single cream
- 40g butter, diced
- Small bunch of fresh parsley, chopped
- A few sprigs chervil, chopped
- 2 tomatoes, peeled and chopped
- Squeeze of lemon juice

● **In a large frying pan**, melt the butter and soften the shallots before adding the mushrooms. Add the thickest first and smallest last to ensure that they are all

cooked through evenly.

● **Season with salt and pepper**, squeeze with lemon juice and sauté until softened.

To make the sauce

- **In a pan**, bring the water to the boil.
- **Reduce the heat**, then stir in the single cream.
- **Add the diced butter slowly**, a few pieces at a time, whisking as you go. Make sure the butter is fully melted and incorporated before adding the next batch.
- **Add the chopped herbs** and tomatoes. Stir to combine. Finish with a squeeze of lemon juice.
- **Transfer warm mushrooms** to a serving dish and dress with the warm sauce. Serve immediately.

