



WHICH MUSHROOM?

WHITE AGARICUS MUSHROOMS

The common white mushroom (*Agaricus bisporus*) comes in a range of different shapes, sizes, flavours and textures, because it is picked and sold at different stages of its growth. It's useful to know which uses best suit button mushrooms, which are best for cups and which for flats, since each of these will give a different result.

You can always be certain of finding white *Agaricus* mushrooms at your supermarket or fruit market. Modern growing techniques mean these mushrooms are available all year, so there's never any reason to do without them.



Cup Mushrooms are mushrooms whose veil has just begun to open around the stem. They are deeper in colour and flavour than buttons, with a firm texture, and absolutely tops for versatility. Great to sauté, stuff, grill or barbecue. Cup mushrooms can be used whole, quartered, or sliced in soups, sauces, casseroles and stir-fries.



Button mushrooms are the youngest type and are tightly closed around the stem. While buttons are usually the smallest white mushroom type, this is not guaranteed – the name refers to the shape and stage of growth, not the size. Buttons (sometimes called champignons) have a wonderful, delicate flavour and a fine texture. Button mushrooms are perfect to use raw in salads or with dips, and they look sensational skewered for the barbecue. They readily take on other flavours, and suit pasta dishes and stir-fries. Kids love them crumbed or tempura style.



Flat mushrooms are the most mature kind and intensely-flavoured of the three white *Agaricus* stages. Their robust flavour is similar to that of field mushrooms. They have a dense, meaty texture and darker gills than the other *Agaricus* types. Flats are almost a meal in themselves, and lend themselves to simple treatments and spectacular presentation. Try flat mushrooms pan-fried with fresh herbs, or topped with crispy bacon, tomato and cheese for a grilled mushroom pizza, or use as the “patty” in a burger. Yum!



SPECIALTY MUSHROOMS

In recent years a number of other mushroom varieties – usually referred to as exotic, gourmet or specialty mushrooms – have found their way onto the shelves of supermarkets and greengrocers. These can certainly add a touch of the exotic to your cooking, but are most cost-effective when used in combination with white *Agaricus* mushrooms – for example, in a mixed-mushroom pasta sauce or risotto.

They are commonly used as garnish.



Oyster Mushrooms, also known as *Pleurotus*, Tree Oyster, *Pleurotte* and *Pleurote* mushrooms. Oyster mushrooms have a fluted, oyster-shell shape and soft texture. The flavour is delicate and subtle, and the flesh succulent. They are versatile, and rapidly absorb other flavours during cooking.

Oyster mushrooms are best cooked quickly, and team well with seafood, chicken, veal and noodles.

They are now available in white, beige, pink or yellow varieties, although the white remains the most widely available. When grown to a large size, they are sometimes sold as “abalone mushrooms”.

FRESH MUSHROOMS

Popular cultivated specialty varieties include:



Shiitake mushrooms, also known as the Oak, Brown Oak, Chinese Black, Black Winter, Oriental Black, golden Oak, Forrest, Donko, Shiang Ku or Black Forest Mushroom. Originating from Japan, where they are known as “the King of Mushrooms”, they have a broad, umbrella-shaped cap with tan gills. The flavour is rich and “woody”, with a meaty texture and a distinctive aroma. Best used cooked. Remove the hard, woody stem before cooking – use these discarded stems to flavour a soup or stock. Ideal for braises, stir fries, soups and sauces – or simply tossed on the barbecue.



Portobello mushrooms, also known, as *Portabella*, *Portabello* or *Giant Cremini* mushrooms are a larger “flat” version of the *Swiss Brown*. The larger size, deeper flavour and dense meaty texture make them ideal for grilling or roasting. Great on the barbecue, or as part of a meatless burger.

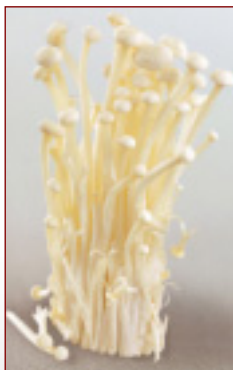


Shimeji mushrooms, also known as Pioppini, Beech, Hon-Shimeji or Honshimeji mushrooms. A Japanese variety found growing on trees in the wild, shimeji have only been cultivated for a limited time, and are even newer to the Australian market as a fresh mushroom.

Their colour ranges from woody brown to tawny white, becoming paler as it matures. Shimeji have a delicate, sweet flesh with a nutty flavour, and are suitable for stirfrying and panfrying. They grow, and are sold, in clumps, and must be separated from the base before using.



Swiss Brown mushrooms, also known as Cremini, Crimini, Honey Brown, Italian Brown, Italian mushroom, Roman Brown and Brown mushrooms. These flavoursome mushrooms are closely related to white Agaricus mushrooms, and are similar in shape with a tan to dark brown colour. The flavour is deeper and earthier than white mushrooms, and their firm flesh means Swiss browns hold their shape well when cooked. Excellent for pasta sauces, risotto and casseroles, or marinate and add to an antipasto platter.



Enoki mushrooms, also known as Enok, Enokidake, Enokitake, Golden Needle, Golden, Snow Puff, Velvet Foot, Velvet Stem and Winter mushrooms. These delicate, slender mushrooms have tiny button caps and long, thread-like stems and grow in clusters. They are creamy white in colour, with a mild, fruity flavour and a crunchy texture when eaten raw. Select firm, cream –coloured enoki mushrooms that are dry at the stem end. Best enjoyed raw in salads or sandwiches or used in soups, clear broths, stir-fries and Japanese dishes such as sukiyaki and shabu shabu. They are sold in clumps – separate and trim the base before using the stems and caps.

Matsutake mushrooms, also known as Japanese Pine mushrooms. Only occasionally available in Australia, these mushrooms have a large cap – up to 12.5cm across – which is often covered with redish-brown scales, and white, crowded gills. A prized inclusion in Japanese dishes.



Chestnut mushrooms have a brown outer skin, a firm texture and a strong, nutty flavour. They are similar in conformation to the cultivated white mushroom, to which they are related. Their lower moisture content makes them an excellent choice for pates, breads and pastries. Chestnut mushrooms, which are available infrequently, are most likely to be sold as buttons or flats.



Maitake mushrooms, also known as Hen-of-the-Woods, Ram's Head, Sheep's Head, Kumotake and Dancing mushrooms. Maitake is another Japanese variety, with a distinctive aroma and pleasant, earthy flavour. Maitakes may be slightly brittle and crumbly at the edge – this is normal, not a sign of age. This mushrooms, which is a new variety to Australians, is said to have many health benefits.



Nameko mushrooms also originate in Japan, and are now beginning to appear fresh in Australia. Nameko mushrooms have a light flavour and an unusual gelatinous texture. Most often served in miso soup.

DRIED MUSHROOMS

Dried mushrooms are mostly imported from Europe and Asia (especially from China). They need to be soaked in hot water before use, to help release their flavour. Another method is to pulverize the dried mushrooms in a food processor and add the resulting powder to dishes.

Varieties available include:

Agaricus mushrooms. The common white mushroom is sometimes sliced and dried at button stage. Usually sold in small cellophane bags, often in the herb and spice section of the supermarket.

Black Chinese mushrooms. Actually the dried form of the shiitake mushroom. Intensely flavoured and great for Asian soups or stir-fries. Soak for up to 30 minutes to reconstitute them. As with all dried mushrooms, the soaking water can also be added to the dish to enhance its flavour.

Cepe mushrooms, also known as Cepe, Cep, Bolete, King Bolete, Borowik, Steinpilze, Stensopp and Polish mushrooms. This is a family of wild mushrooms, gathered in the forests of Europe during the northern autumn and sold dried. Soak for around 15 minutes to reconstitute before using. Cepes perform best in casseroles or stews, where they can add a depth of flavour. Porcini is one of the most popular of the cepes.



Black fungus and white fungus, also known as Cloud Ear, Wood Ear, Tree Ear and Silver Ear fungus. These are used primarily to add a special texture to Asian dishes, and are available dried (and very occasionally fresh) from Asian and gourmet food shops. Soak dried fungi for 15-30 minutes to reconstitute, then cook quickly to retain crunch.





Morels are a European wild mushrooms with a hollow, honeycomb-like cap and spongy texture. Rinse or wipe dried morels before soaking, to ensure the cap is free of sand and grit, then soak for 15-20 minutes to reconstitute. Morels have a rich, earthy flavour and are best used in sauces and slow-cooked dishes.

Chanterelle mushrooms, also known as Egg, Girole, Girolle and Pfifferling mushrooms. Chanterelles are among the most popular of edible wild mushrooms in Europe and North America. Chanterelles are a whole family of mushrooms, but the name is used most often of the golden or yellow chanterelle. Chanterelles are trumpet-shaped, and have a strong apricot smell. Soak for 15-20 minutes to reconstitute. Dried chanterelles can have a rubbery texture, so you may find the soaking liquid is more useful.

TRUFFLES

Truffles are an edible fungus, but not technically a mushroom. They are among the world's most prized foods, and are traditionally gathered from the forests of Europe. Truffles are expensive, whether black or white, canned or fresh, so they're best used in ways that left a little go a long way – to flavour oil, scent eggs or rice, to flavour sauces or event grated raw into salads. They are highly perishable, so use fresh truffles within a few days of purchase. Imported truffles are available fresh or canned. There is also a fledgling local industry in Tasmania, which has achieved small but promising harvests.

