

# Mouth-Watering Mushrooms



**Eric Baker**  
Estill County Extension  
Agent for Agriculture  
& Natural Resources

Our popular Mountain Mushroom Festival is April 27th and 28th so let's learn a little about mushrooms. Mushrooms are fungi that grow from microscopic spores. They live off decaying organic matter such as wood, straw, and manure. Several different mushrooms are grown by farmers. The mushroom farmers purchase spawn, which is actually grain or seed inoculated with spores, and place it in special compost or in logs.

The most commonly cultivated varieties are portabella, shiitake, crimini, and white mushrooms. The more exotic varieties, such as morel, oyster mushroom, beech mushroom, enoki, and maitake are increasing in popularity as people learn to use them.

Mushrooms contain a variety of nutrients, in-

cluding a small amount of B vitamins. A one-half cup serving contains only 9 calories. Common mushrooms are higher in potassium than exotics and shiitake are higher in selenium.

Knowledgeable mushroom experts can safely pick wild mushrooms. You have to know which are edible and not poisonous. For one of our newest publications on the importance of identifying common wild mushrooms, go to the following internet webpage: <https://plant-pathology.ca.uky.edu/files/ppfs-gen-14.pdf>

The safest choice would be to buy through your local grocery store or farmer's market. Select mushrooms that are firm and evenly colored with tightly closed caps. The thin membrane under the cap is known as the veil. A closed veil indicates a delicate flavor while an open veil indicates a richer flavor. The veil opens as moisture is lost, concentrating the mushroom's essence.

The average shelf life of mushrooms depends on the variety. A brown or black veil indicates the mushroom is past its prime. For optimum results, The Mushroom Council recommends re-



frigerating mushrooms in a porous paper bag. Avoid airtight containers because moisture condensation causes the mushrooms to spoil rapidly. Mushrooms absorb strong odors, so store away from onions or garlic.

To clean mushrooms, gently wipe with a damp cloth or soft brush. Or, rinse with cold water and pat dry with paper towels. Avoid soaking mushrooms. Mushrooms bruise easily so they should be handled with care.

Mushrooms can be prepared many ways, including grilling, roasting, baking, frying, sautéing, stuffed, and as a topping. With the Asian influence, add soy sauce, ginger, lemon grass, and sesame seeds to enhance the natural flavorings. Mediterranean influences of olive oil, garlic, thyme and lemon also bring out the richness of mushrooms.

Frequently, the richer, woodsy tasting mushrooms like shiitake, crimini, or oyster are combined with more mellow flavored mushrooms. Some mushrooms can be eaten raw. Pleasant tasting mushrooms include the common white, crimini, and portabella. The mild, crunchy enoki can be added to soups or salads uncooked. The possibilities are endless, so try adding mushrooms to garlic bread, baked potatoes, scrambled eggs, and your favorite entrée and side dish recipes.

For more information, contact the Estill County Extension Office at 723-4557. Enjoy the festival and the beauty of springtime!

Educational programs of the Cooperative Extension Service serve all people regardless of economic or social status and will not discriminate on the basis of race, color, ethnic origin, national origin, creed, religion, political belief, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expressions, pregnancy, marital status, genetic information, age, veteran status, or physical or mental disability.