

[Taste the earth in mushrooms and Mendocino Pinot Noir](#)

- Lynne Char Bennett

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Fall brings rain and rain brings fabulous fungi. It's prime season for mushrooms, and Mendocino County's will soon be on the market.

The region's forests are home to more than 3,000 mushroom varieties, of which 20 are readily identified and safe to eat (only experts should forage for mushrooms). Seven varieties from Mendocino County are commercially available, including porcini, matsutakes, chanterelles, hedgehogs, black trumpets and yellow foot.

Eric Schramm, owner of Mendocino Mushroom Co., is a wholesale broker whose company processes up to 60,000 pounds of mushrooms each year, primarily from Mendocino County. Schramm says local porcini (also called cepes or boletes) are generally available in November. Mendocino is primarily a late-winter mushroom area for matsutake and candy-cap varieties (the latter is the rarest culinary mushroom in existence; it's usually sold dried), in December; hedgehogs and yellow foot (also called winter chanterelle) come in January-February, and the black trumpet (horn-of-plenty) is available from February through May.

I love mushrooms in all forms and cook them often. They're versatile wine-pairing partners and are especially good with Pinot Noir.

Mendocino County -- particularly cool-climate Anderson Valley -- produces Pinot Noirs with ripe berry aromas and flavors; some wines also have notes of vanilla, spice, mushroom, earth, anise, chocolate, cedar and menthol.

The wines' fruit, which ranges from lush and juicy to subtle and delicate, contrasts with the earthy mushrooms; the earthy quality in some of the wines enhances the mushroom aromas and flavors in a dish.

Alan Kantor, executive chef at MacCallum House Restaurant in Mendocino, uses local fresh porcini and dried porcini in his Savory Wild Mushroom Bread Pudding. This straightforward recipe relies on the dried porcini to intensify the mushroom flavor, although Kantor says they can be omitted; additional fresh mushrooms can be used instead.

An optional garnish of sauteed mushrooms provides even more of the savory, meaty goodness. Vegetarians can substitute vegetable or mushroom broth for the chicken broth and veal stock.

I could make a meal of salad, sauteed greens and a large serving of Savory Wild Mushroom Bread Pudding, though roast chicken or pork chops would lend their juices to the bread pudding

for an even more delectable dish.

I'm excited to try more mushroom dishes and wine, as area chefs -- including those at Mendocino County restaurants and wineries -- add fall ingredients to their menus.

The county celebrates its mushroom season Nov. 10-15 at the sixth annual Mendocino Wine & Mushroom Fest. Activities include mushroom and wine pairing dinners, cooking demonstrations, mushroom identification walks and mushroom workshops. Prices for events vary. For information, call the Mendocino County Alliance, (707) 462-7417, or visit gomendo.com.

Savory Wild Mushroom Bread Pudding

This recipe, from MacCallum House Restaurant executive chef Alan Kantor, is good with any mix of wild and cultivated mushrooms. If you are roasting or sauteing meat or chicken, Kantor suggests heating pieces of the pudding in the oven alongside the meat when the meat is almost done. The pudding absorbs the meat's flavorful cooking juices and provides additional flavor.

INGREDIENTS:

2 cups heavy whipping cream

3 cups low-salt chicken broth reduced to 1 1/2 cups

1/2 cup rich veal stock

1 teaspoon fresh thyme, chopped

1/2 cup dried porcini

1/2 pound fresh porcini

3 tablespoons butter

1 small onion, 1/2-inch dice

1 pound day-old sourdough bread, 3/4-inch dice

1 teaspoon chopped flat-leaf parsley (optional)

8 large egg yolks (save whites for another use)

Sea salt or kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

1 1/2-2 cups sauteed mushrooms (optional garnish, see recipe)

INSTRUCTIONS:

Preheat oven to 350°.

Place cream, reduced chicken broth, veal stock, thyme and dried porcini in a small pot; bring to

a simmer and turn off heat. Let steep until ready to use.

Meanwhile, slice fresh mushrooms into bite-size pieces 1/4-inch thick and then saute over medium-high to high heat in 1 1/2 tablespoons of the butter in a large saute pan so they sear well. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Remove to a bowl and reserve.

Reduce heat to medium. Saute the onion in the remaining 1 1/2 tablespoons butter until soft and semi-caramelized; season with salt and pepper.

Strain the liquid from the previously dried porcini; season liquid to taste with salt and pepper. Chop the rehydrated porcini into 1/4-inch pieces.

Mix the rehydrated and fresh porcini and onions with the bread cubes and parsley (optional). Place mixture in a buttered 9 x 13-inch pan.

If the strained liquid is still hot, temper the egg yolks by adding liquid slowly while whisking. Pour the liquid over the bread, pushing bread down into the liquid. Let sit for approximately 30 minutes.

Bake uncovered on top shelf of the oven until set, about 30-40 minutes.

Cool for 30 minutes before cutting and serving with optional sauteed mushroom garnish.

Serves 12

Note: You can make ahead, cool to room temperature and wrap before storing in the refrigerator. When ready to reheat, cut pudding into serving-size portions and move them to a sheet pan. Pour a little melted butter and chicken broth into the bottom of the now empty 9 x 13-inch pan, then replace the pudding. Place several cut pieces of butter on top and place in a preheated 450°-500° oven for about 10 minutes.

PER SERVING: 345 calories, 10 g protein, 26 g carbohydrate, 23 g fat (12 g saturated), 204 mg cholesterol, 312 mg sodium, 3 g fiber.

Sauteed Mushrooms

Any kind of mushroom can be used for this recipe. If you use different kinds, cook each type separately to make sure they are evenly cooked, then mix together. Alternatively, start cooking the larger or more dense pieces first, adding the smaller, more delicate ones last.

INGREDIENTS:

1-1 1/4 pounds mushrooms

1 tablespoon olive oil

1-2 tablespoons unsalted butter

1/2-1 teaspoon minced garlic

Kosher salt and pepper to taste

2-3 tablespoons brandy, dry white wine or Marsala

Broth or water as needed

2-3 tablespoons cream (optional)

Chopped parsley to garnish (optional)

INSTRUCTIONS:

Clean mushrooms; cut into pieces as desired.

Heat olive oil in a medium-large skillet over medium heat. When hot, add butter, garlic and mushrooms. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Cook the mushrooms -- stirring occasionally - - until much of their moisture cooks off, about 7-10 minutes. Add the brandy and cook a minute or two more; the mushrooms should still be nicely moist, or add water or broth.

Mushrooms can be made ahead and refrigerated; rewarm before optional finish with whisked-in cream and parsley.

Yields about 1 1/2-2 cups, enough for 12 servings

PER SERVING: 33 calories, 1 g protein, 2 g carbohydrate, 2 g fat (1 g saturated), 3 mg cholesterol, 2 mg sodium, 0 g fiber.

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