

MUSHROOM RISOTTO

It's a tough time of year for fresh vegetables. Other than those grown in a hothouse, we're deep into root vegetable season. I have great respect for potatoes and parsnips, but sometimes I just want something different. Enter the mushroom. Thankfully those delightful fungi can be harvested all-year-round.

One of my favorite ways to use mushrooms is in a classic risotto. Rather than buying a boring boxed stock, I like to go all-in on the mushroom flavor. I use those dried mushrooms way in the back of my pantry to make a quick stock. You know you have some in the back of your pantry. Pull them out – it's worth the extra step.

INGREDIENTS

For Mushroom Stock:

1 cup dried mushrooms
1 medium shallot, diced
7 cups water
1 tablespoon olive oil
1 teaspoon kosher salt

For Risotto:

3 tablespoons olive oil
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup prosciutto, diced
5-6 cups mushroom stock
2 cups mushrooms, thickly sliced
1 medium shallot, diced

1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups Arborio rice

1 pinch saffron

1 cup dry white wine

2 tablespoons butter

2 tablespoons finely chopped chives, plus 1 tablespoon for garnish

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese, plus 2 tablespoons for garnish

kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

PREPARATION

For Mushroom Stock:

In a 2-quart pot, heat the olive oil and sauté the shallot for one minute. Add in dried mushrooms and sauté one minute. Add water and salt, bring to a boil, then lower to a simmer for 25 minutes, or until mushrooms have softened.

Strain out mushrooms, chop up half, and set aside. (Save the other half for omelets or leftovers.)

For Risotto:

In a separate 3-quart pot, heat 2 tablespoons olive oil over medium-high heat. Add fresh mushrooms and sauté for about three minutes. Remove mushrooms and their liquid, adding them to the mushrooms that were set aside from the stock. Set aside.

Add the remaining 1-tablespoon olive oil to the saucepan. Stir in shallots and prosciutto and cook for 1 minute. Add in rice, stirring for another two minutes.

Pour in the wine, stirring until the wine is fully absorbed. Add in saffron. Add $\frac{1}{2}$ -cup warm mushroom stock to the rice, and stir until the stock is absorbed. Continue adding stock, $\frac{1}{2}$

cup at a time, stirring constantly, until the liquid is absorbed and the rice is tender about 18-20 minutes.

Remove from heat. Stir in reserved mushrooms and their liquid, Parmesan cheese, butter, and chives. Season with salt and pepper.

To serve, scoop out risotto into bowls and garnish with remaining chives and cheese.

BAKED BRIE BOULE

Are you looking for an easy, impressive dish for cocktail hour? Here's a fun idea that looks great and is fun to eat. The whole idea is to pre-cut the boule so that your guests can easily tear off pieces and dip them into the luscious melted cheese. It's hard to resist!

INGREDIENTS

1 medium sized round French Boule

$\frac{1}{2}$ stick salted butter

1 teaspoon chopped fresh chives

1, 4-5 inch wheel of Brie, rind trimmed

2 tablespoons of fig jam

$\frac{1}{2}$ loaf baguette, sliced

PREPARATION

Pre-heat oven to 350 degrees.

Using the Brie wheel to measure, trim out the center of the

boule so that the wheel can fit inside. Cut the removed bread into chunks for dipping and set aside.

Pre-cut the boule into 1½-inch squares, without cutting all the way through the loaf. You want your bread bowl to still have some integrity. It's as if you're perforating the sides in advance so that you'll be able to easily tear off pieces once the dish is ready.

In a small saucepan, melt the butter. Brush the bread with the butter mixture.

Cut the Brie in half horizontally so that you now have two circles. Smear the fig jam on the top of one half. Place the other half on top as if you just made a brie/fig jam sandwich. (Note – if you don't want the fig jam inside, feel free to serve it separately on the side).

Place the bread on a cookie sheet. Place the Brie inside the bread opening. Bake for 7 – 8 minutes or until the Brie starts to ooze. Keep an eye on it, because you don't want it to be completely melted, just soft enough to dip.

For presentation, place the boule on a cutting board. Sprinkle the chives on top of the cheese. Place the pre-cut bread chunks and a few baguette slices around the loaf and serve while hot.

THE TRAUMA OF MOO GOO GAI PAN

Of all my childhood memories, the ones that really stick fascinate me. One of my most vivid recollections revolved around my family's weekly Sunday night ritual of eating Chinese food. Most of the time we ordered takeout and I often

went with my dad to pick up the food. It was a short drive down South Oyster Bay Road to China View. I never minded going with him as long as we didn't have to actually sit down and eat. Eating at a Chinese restaurant had become a rather traumatic affair for me. One might wonder what hidden horrors exist at the local Chinese restaurant. Believe me, you'd be surprised.



One night my parents decided to take us all out to dinner for the first time at a fancy new Chinese restaurant called Dragon Sky. I must have been about 4-years old. Mom wanted us all to have good manners, so she taught us how to tuck our napkins in our laps, how to use the right utensils for the right job, and how to keep our screaming to a minimum. I was a real people-pleaser, so I wanted to do the right thing. So I learned how to tuck my napkin in my lap, use the right utensils, and not scream in public.



We always ordered the same thing every week: Wonton Soup with "extra crunchies," (aka fried noodles), Shrimp in Lobster Sauce, Moo Goo Gai Pan, Spare Ribs, Egg Rolls, Fried Rice, and Roast Pork. Needless to say, we didn't keep kosher. We were in the middle of our Moo Goo Gai Pan when I realized I really had to go pee. I politely rose from the table and tried to dash off to the ladies room. What followed me, to my surprise and horror, were the Wonton Soup, Shrimp in Lobster Sauce, Moo Goo Gai Pan, Spare Ribs, Egg Rolls, Fried Rice, and Roast Pork. I had tucked the tablecloth, not my napkin, into my favorite striped capri pants. Unlike a magician who could yank the tablecloth out from underneath every plate, I took it all with me.



Two waiters came rushing over and started picking up the

shattered plates. My brothers broke into hysterics, so I made a beeline for the bathroom and proceeded to cry for what seemed like an eternity. My cheeks felt like they were on fire from embarrassment. Mom tried to comfort me, but I could sense she was fighting back her own laughter. This story became part of our too-oft repeated family lore. My brothers were kind enough to share it with all the neighborhood kids so that my humiliation was extended beyond the family circle. To this day, I have a lot of issues with napkins.

KK's PAINKILLER

I don't know about you, but winter is starting to get on my nerves. I think it's time for a tropical distraction. It's time for a Painkiller. Supposedly this drink originated in the British Virgin Islands, but thankfully it made it past US customs into the US Virgin Islands where I first tasted one. I don't know what it is about rum and the Caribbean, but it's a perfect pairing. Here's my take on it. Note the little extra something at the end.

INGREDIENTS

1 ounce light rum

1 ounce dark rum

1 ounce freshly squeezed orange juice

4 ounces pineapple juice

1 ounce cream of coconut

1 ounce Grand Marnier

Freshly grated nutmeg and orange twist for garnish

PREPARATION

Fill a cocktail shaker with ice. Pour in the rums, orange juice, pineapple juice and cream of coconut. Shake well.

Pour into a chilled highball glass. Gently pour the Grand Marnier on top as a floater. Garnish with grated nutmeg and an orange twist

THE HAPPY PLACE

As the temperature continues to drop and the days go from gray to ugly gray, I long for my happy place, St. John in the Virgin Islands. My husband and I have been lucky enough to return to their white sand beaches and aquamarine waters many times. I imagine we're there as the smell of conch fritters frying up at the local beach bar lures us over.



We place an order for a dozen as we sip on rum painkillers while we wait. There's no shame in day-drinking here, it's just what you do.

After lunch, we find a nice beach, settle in with a good book and immediately fall asleep. That painkiller was strong. No matter, there's nothing to do but relax, take a swim, look out at the passing sailboats and think about dinner. We have no cell service here and even that's a blessing.



The only thing that breaks our reverie is the arrival of a swarm of no see-ums around sunset. It's like a tropical alarm clock to get us to move.

We head back to the house we've rented, make ourselves another painkiller and watch the sunset from above Hawksnest Beach.



We're too relaxed to get dressed to go out, so we heat up some leftovers for dinner. As we turn out the lights, the sky reveals a sea of stars. The Milky Way crosses over our house and we even spot a messier within Orion without binoculars. We know tomorrow will be just like today and the day before and we're fine with that.



If I could only bottle that feeling as I sit here shivering waiting for the oil company to fix our boiler, all would be well in my world.

EGGS FOR DINNER

Do you want to lighten up your dinner plans a bit after your gluttonous holiday celebrations? How about eggs for dinner? To me, they are the perfect food. They have protein to keep you sated and they can go with almost anything leftover in your fridge. Rummaging through mine, I found some leftover moo shu chicken, a container of fried rice and a few scallions. It will do.

INGREDIENTS (serves 1 or 2)

1/3 cup leftover *moo shu* chicken (feel free to substitute other Chinese food leftovers)

1/3 cup fried rice

2 scallions, chopped

3 eggs

1 Tablespoon soy sauce

2 Tablespoons vegetable oil

PREPARATION (serves 1 or 2)

Preheat oven to 375 degrees.

In a medium-sized bowl, mix together the *moo shu* chicken, fried rice, and all but one tablespoon of the scallions in a bowl. Save the remaining scallions for garnish.

In a separate bowl, lightly beat the eggs and the soy sauce together. (*NOTE: Normally at this point, I would add salt, but there's enough salt in the Chinese food and soy sauce for this dish. No need to add more unless you like things very salty.*)



In an oven-proof skillet, heat the oil. Add the *moo shu* rice

mixture and heat for one minute, lightly stirring ingredients in pan.

Add the eggs and quickly even out the mixture and eggs with a spatula. Cook on top of stove for one minute.

Gently move the pan to the oven. Bake for 7-8 minutes.

Remove from oven. Using a spatula, gently dig under the eggs to loosen from pan. Once loosen, gently slide onto plate. Garnish with remaining scallions.

Chī hảo hē hảo!



PASILLA POZOLE SOUP

When I was in Mexico late last year, I stuffed my suitcase with all kinds of food products that I can't find here in New York. One older woman tucked in a corner of a market in Oaxaca offered a taste of her homemade pasilla paste. It tasted smoky and earthy and had a rich dark brown color. Of course I bought some and it's been sitting in my fridge ever since. That is, until today. Say hello to my version of pasilla pozole soup. Fair warning – it's got a bit of a kick.

INGREDIENTS

2 tablespoons olive oil

1 sweet onion, sliced

3 cloves garlic, minced

1 poblano pepper, diced

2 tablespoons pasilla paste (or any Mexican medium-hot pepper paste)

6 cups turkey bone broth (or boxed chicken broth)

1 14 oz can pozole

1 ear of corn, stripped, (or one small can sweet corn)

1 cup chopped cooked chicken

1 avocado, sliced for garnish

sour cream for garnish

3 corn tortillas for garnish

PREPARATION

In a dutch oven, heat olive oil. Sauté the onion until translucent, about 8 minutes. Add in garlic, poblano and pasilla paste, stirring for about one minute. Add in 1/2 cup of the broth to help dissolve the paste. Add in pozole, corn and chicken and stir one more minute. Pour in the rest of the stock, bring to a boil and then simmer for 25 minutes. Make sure that all of the pasilla paste has dissolved and that there are no clumps remaining.

While the soup is simmering, cut the tortillas into 1/2"-inch strips. Spray or brush lightly with olive oil. Bake them in the oven at 375-degrees until they just begin to brown and become stiff, about 5-8 minutes. You want the strips to have a good crunch factor.

TO SERVE

Ladle soup into a bowl and garnish with a dollop of sour cream, a few slices of avocado, and some tortilla strips.

SOUP SOLVES EVERYTHING

Just off Serangoon Road in Singapore, on the 4th floor City Square Mall's Food Republic is a small hawker stall that serves the best cure-all soup I've ever tasted. If you're feeling blue, homesick, or just under the weather, find your way to *Qiu Lian Ban Mian* and order the #5 Dumpling *Ban Mee* Soup. I realize this may be a tad out of the way for many of you, but should you find yourself nearby, it's well worth a visit.



Ban Mian is a handmade Chinese thick noodle served in an addictive Asian chicken broth that I've been trying to replicate for years. (If any of my old Singaporean pals have a good recipe, please send it my way!).

First the noodles go in the bottom of the bowl, the broth is added, and then some *xiao bai cai* (little white cabbage). Next, two or three enormous pork wontons are gingerly placed on top of the noodles. The wontons alone would be enough for any meal. A common accompaniment in many Asian dishes is a raw egg. It is cracked on top, cooked by the heat of the broth and adds a richness and depth to the soup. And finally, the bowl is garnished with small anchovies, fried shallots, and a few drops of chili oil.

I first discovered this dish while in the midst of a horrible head cold. The steaming broth and kick from the chili oil opened my nasal passages enough to allow my tastebuds to luxuriate in this heavenly dish. I am convinced that it has healing properties and I would return for more whenever I had a bad day or wasn't feeling 100%.

Although I've bombed out on all of my attempts to make this dish, I have hope that one day it will all come together. If not, I'll just have to save up those frequent flyer miles and return. I don't think traveling half way around the globe for a bowl of soup is too excessive, do you?

HAPPY HOLIDAY COCKTAIL

Having a few special holiday cocktails in your repertoire is always a wise move. Whether you're planning a dinner party or just trying to take the edge off after everyone leaves, this is one of my favorite go-to winter drinks. It's a variation on the classic Hot Toddy. After you down your second one, nothing will bother you.

INGREDIENTS ☐(2 drinks)

2 ounces bourbon

2 ounces Grand Marnier

18 ounces water

2 black tea bags (or tea of your choice)

2 teaspoons honey

2 squirts lemon

FOR GARNISH

2 orange slices, (thinly sliced)

2 lemon slices (thinly sliced)

2 cinnamon sticks

4 star anises

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT

2, 12 ounce heat-proof clear mugs or glasses

PREPARATION

For this cocktail, you'll need 2 mugs for mixing and 2 clear mugs for presentation. Boil water and pour nine ounces of water into each of your mixing cups. Add one tea bag in each cup and steep for 3-4 minutes, or strength of your choice.

Remove tea bags and pour in 1-ounce bourbon, 1-ounce Grand Marnier, 1-teaspoon honey and 1-squirt of lemon into each mixing mug. Stir until honey is dissolved.

In the clear presentation mugs or heatproof glasses, place one orange and one lemon slice in each mug so they stick to the side of the glass facing out. You'll find that thin slices work best because they are more yielding. Pour the liquid contents slowly into the clear mugs, trying not to disturb the slices.

Garnish each with a cinnamon stick and 2 star anises. Cheers!

HOW TO HAVE FUN AT YOUR OWN HOLIDAY PARTY

When I was first married, I hated throwing parties. It was so much work, I never got to enjoy one minute of it. I'd spend all day on my feet frantically trying to get everything together before our guests arrived. Then I'd run around refilling drinks and washing dishes as everyone else noshed

away and settled into conversations.

But over the years, I've developed a foolproof plan that frees me up to join in on the fun. It does require an excel spreadsheet, make-ahead recipes, and a slightly anal-retentive nature.



STEP #1 – Decide what kind of party you're having. Is it a dinner party? Just cocktails and hors d'oeuvres? A brunch?

STEP #2 – Pick your dishes wisely. The key is finding recipes that can be done a day or so before and then just reheated or served cold.

STEP #3 – Make a spreadsheet. I'm not kidding. The first thing I do is label the dishes along the top. Next, I list the ingredients I need to buy beneath each dish. You can then cut and paste that section onto a separate page for your shopping list.

STEP #4 – Below the ingredients, I list the four days of the week leading up to the party. Below each day, I assign tasks that can be done ahead.

STEP #5 – Make sure to include things like cleaning the house, setting the table, prepping your bar, etc. to the list. These can be a real time suck, and it's important to allot ample time for each.

STEP #6 – Stick to the plan. If you're feeling overwhelmed, there's no shame in asking someone to bring a dish. Just be specific about what you need.

STEP #7 – Assign tasks to your spouse, partner, kids, and/or good friends.

STEP #8 – If something doesn't come out well, don't worry about it. Chances are you've made way too much food anyway.

STEP #9 – Don't leave showering and getting dressed to the last minute. You'll always run out of time and you don't want to greet your guests looking like a worn out dishrag.

STEP#10 – Now pour yourself a cocktail and have a great time.