



Cooking with Australian mushrooms

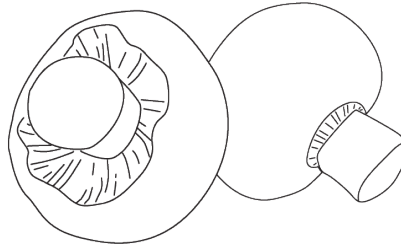
With so many varieties grown locally, why would you cook with anything else!

We have a huge mushroom industry here in Australia that dates back to 1933, when ingenious Aussie farmers put disused railway tunnels under Sydney to good use by growing mushrooms in them. Nowadays, thanks to the influence of cultures from around the world, a huge range of Aussie-grown mushrooms and fungus are available that allows us to branch out and explore the possibilities of cooking with more than just one or two varieties.



White buttons and Swiss Brown

We should all be familiar with the White buttons and Swiss Brown 'Agaricus' varieties as they are readily available in our greengrocers and supermarkets nation wide. They're extremely versatile thanks to their firm flesh, making them perfect for frying, baking or adding to a sauce and are guaranteed to add a beautiful aroma, silky texture and savoury earthy taste to any dish. Portabella mushrooms are from the same family and are far larger making them a wonderful meat substitute in a burger or even as a mini pizza base!



Chestnut

Chestnut mushrooms are one of the oldest cultivated mushroom species in the world (thanks to the ancient Greeks) and really stand out due to its long slender stalks, dusty brown top and beautiful nutty flavour. Try sautéing them with some garlic butter and thyme as a great side to eggs on toasted sourdough, or use them to make a spectacular mushroom pasta or risotto, yum!



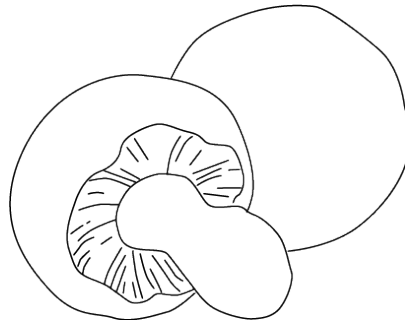
Oyster

Oyster mushrooms, known for their exquisite fluted oyster-shell shape, come in a range of colours including pearly-yellow, grey-brown, purple and even pink! They have a delicate, subtle flavour and velvety texture. Their soft, succulent flesh is great at absorbing flavours. Oyster mushrooms are best cooked quickly over high heat and are the perfect addition to seafood, chicken, veal and pork dishes. Add them to soups and noodle dishes, or crumb and deep-fry. A far larger member of this same family is King Brown, this thick stem heavy variety is bold and meaty and makes a wonderful alternative to meat.



Asian mushrooms

We are so lucky in Australia to be surrounded by such multiculturalism, and this is no more evident than by the abundance of foods and flavours that each culture brings with it. Mushrooms are no exception and we can thank our asian neighbours for some of the most interesting mushrooms on the market! White Fungus and Wood Ear are both essential ingredients to a huge range of Chinese inspired dishes including soups and stir fry. While the Japanese have given us some of the world's most popular varieties including Enoki, Namiko and Shimeji. Beyond these mushroom's stunning aesthetics, their beautiful flavour and crunch can't be replicated.

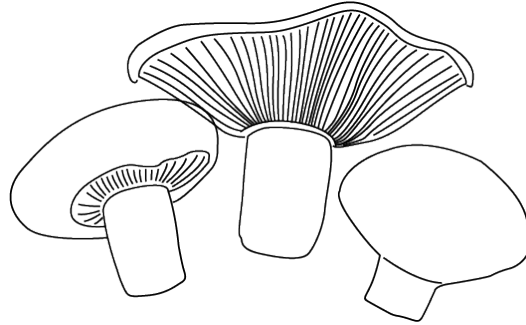


Shitake

By far the most popular variety of mushroom in the world has got to be the Shitake. This Umami-rich variety is an essential ingredient in any number of

Asian dishes across both Chinese and Japanese. Readily available in dried form from Asian grocers, these textured mushrooms are now grown fresh here in Australia and provide a whole new dimension to dishes when used over their dried equivalent.

Pine Mushrooms & Slippery Jacks



If you're looking for some wild native Australian mushrooms, ask around for some Pine Mushrooms or Slippery Jacks. Both have a rich orange 'saffron' colour and are quite fragile. Pine Mushrooms are tender and give a full roasted nut flavour. Slippery Jacks are only available in Autumn and can be a great addition to almost any dish. Combining the two with fresh pasta or any egg-based dish is a no brainer. It's always advisable to peel the Slippery Jacks' cap before cooking to avoid stomach aches.

You can buy most of the varieties mentioned within this article from supermarkets, Asian grocery stores, online, at farmers markets, or you could make a day of it and go directly to the farms themselves! Call ahead and you might be able to organise a walk around the farm. With the temperature dropping and Winter well and truly upon us, this is the perfect time to be preparing hearty, comfort meals. So add mushrooms to your shopping list and get cooking!