

The search for fall flavor

A recipe for foraged wild mushroom stew

BY DAVID CAMPICHE

The ground was bone dry. The sky heavy with that somber pewter cast that sneaks off the ocean and frequently snuffs out higher expectations like a candle flame buffeted by a Northwest wind.

But I was happy, expectant and confident. Somewhere in a nearby forest, I was going to find enough mushrooms to accompany a rich stew with a slab of top round beef and a basket of garden vegetables.

There had been little to no real rain for two months, and mushrooms need a ground cover heavy with moisture. By that, I mean rain, heavy rain. A rain that soaks deep. But that wasn't to be, at least not yet, just now, early in September.

I plodded on, like a Boy Scout on a mission. The first lurch of fulfillment revealed itself on the dead trunk of a cedar tree. I spotted a mushroom called "chicken of the

woods," its bright orange color gleamed like a pumpkin in October. Sometimes called a sulfur shelf (*Laetiporus sulphureus*), it toughens quickly without rain. The mushroom is woody, but when young, the outer flesh (2 or 3 inches deep) is wonderful when braised slowly in a stew. This one was too old. I moved on, not quite as buoyant as before.

At the end of the path, I stumbled upon three lobster mushrooms and rejoiced. There, just a few feet away was one of my favorite fungi, the cauliflower mushroom, a delicate, crepe-like mushroom that is a perfect match to a proper side of beef.

All three of these mushrooms are parasites and each chooses specific trees, all partially rotten. I found no chanterelles, though there were rumors of a few found inland and in the Olympics. My favorite, the porcini, would simply have to wait. I headed home with these savory treasures.



Photos by David Campiche

ABOVE: The wild mushroom stew on a bed of whole grain rice. **RIGHT:** Red wine and chicken stock are used to braise the vegetables and mushrooms. **BELOW RIGHT:** David Campiche's stew is comprised of fresh produce and locally foraged mushrooms.



Dinner had to be prepared, in this case, braised and slow-cooked. And let me just say, leave out the beef if you are vegetarian, nobody will be disappointed.

Ingredients:

- Three lobster mushrooms of medium size (4 to 6 inches), diced
- One medium cauliflower mushroom, softball-size, cut in ½ inch pieces
- 2 cups of diced "chicken of the woods" or 10 diced *Agaricus* mushrooms (*Agaricus campestris*)
- One 12 to 16 oz cut of top round steak or brisket, cubed into ½ chunks
- Two sweet peppers, medium chopped
- One large onion, diced
- Two carrots diced, ¼ inch cubes
- Three stalks of celery, diced, ¼ inch cubes
- Four garlic cloves, minced
- Three Thai chilis, added whole and removed before serving
- 1 heaping tablespoon mushroom dust (directions below)
- 1 quart homemade chicken or beef stock
- 1 cup red wine
- 1 teaspoon chili powder (I love Hatch), more if you like heat
- 2 to 3 tbs. cornstarch mixed with 4 tbs. water or cold stock, mixed and held for thickening the liquid
- Half cup of cream or coconut cream (optional)
- 4 tablespoons of olive oil
- Parsley or basil for garnish
- Salt and pepper to taste



Preparation:

Sauté onion, celery and garlic in 4 tablespoons of olive oil. Add the vegetables. Then add the diced beef and brown lightly. Add the mushrooms and continue to sauté slowly, with low heat. Pour in the red wine and chicken stock and slowly braise the ingredients. Add the spices, mushroom dust and chilis.

Simmer in a very soft roll for two hours. Garnish with fine chopped parsley or fresh basil. Thicken with the corn starch slurry.

Mushroom dust is made from dried mushrooms thrown in a food processor and reduced to a fine dust. Keeps for years and adds immense flavor to stew and sauces. I make mine from larger porcini that are a bit soft, when picked. I dry them in a food dehydrator.

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