

Magnificent, Marvelous, Mouth-watering Mushrooms

CELEBRATE THEM
SEPTEMBER 12 & 13
AND BEYOND

Liz Tarditi

THE BRANDYWINE VALLEY'S rich agricultural heritage is rooted in an organism that bridges ancient lore and cutting-edge science: the humble mushroom. Long before Kennett Square became the Mushroom Capital of the World, mushrooms held a revered place in human history. Mushroom cultivation dates back to at least the 3rd century BCE, and for more than 2,000 years they have been treasured in traditional Chinese medicine for their restorative and balancing properties.

Today, modern science is beginning to explain why. Emerging research suggests mushrooms contain bioactive compounds that support immune function, provide antioxidant protection and may offer neuroprotective benefits that support brain health.

This remarkable biochemical profile is what sets mushrooms apart from the rest of the agricultural world. As local mycologist Tina Ellor explained, "We get things from mushrooms we don't get from other sources of food."

As members of their own biological kingdom, mushrooms produce unique compounds — including complex polysaccharides, ergothioneine and, when

exposed to ultraviolet light, vitamin D — that distinguish them from both plants and animals. Add exceptional flavor, impressive versatility and remarkable nutritional density, and it's easy to understand why mushrooms are increasingly recognized as one of nature's true superfoods.

The Woodlands at Phillips brings that story to life. Housed in the beautifully restored childhood home of Gertrude Phillips, the family matriarch whose recipes continue to be enjoyed generations later, the historic farmhouse has become a destination where visitors can discover gourmet mushroom products, thoughtfully curated gifts, hands-on cooking classes and, perhaps most importantly, a deeper appreciation for fungi.

The Phillips family, whose legacy helped establish Kennett Square as the Mushroom Capital of the World, continues to share that knowledge through education, hospitality and community outreach, including support for Lily's Lighthouse, an organization dedicated to helping children living with epilepsy and their families.

For this month's Brandywine Table, The Woodlands at Phillips generously

shared treasured family recipes alongside contemporary favorites from its cooking classes, showcasing the extraordinary versatility of mushrooms. From a comforting Phillips family casserole and an elegant Northern Italian pioppini pasta to grilled chestnut mushrooms, a hearty royal trumpet entree salad and crisp shiitake "bacon," these recipes prove that one of the world's oldest cultivated foods remains one of its most exciting — and delicious — ingredients.

Want to know more about mushrooms? Mark your calendar for September 12 and 13 and head to Kennett Square's 41st annual Mushroom Festival to celebrate the local fungi with a mile-long street fair, culinary events and farm-to-table educational exhibits. Still want more? Return to Kennett for a unique New Year's Eve celebration that includes dropping a massive illuminated stainless-steel mushroom!



The Woodlands at Phillips



The Woodlands at Phillips Shiitake "Bacon"

With their naturally savory, smoky flavor, shiitake mushrooms crisp beautifully in the oven. Sprinkle them over soups, salads, grain bowls or baked potatoes, or simply enjoy them straight from the pan as a satisfying snack.



Serves 6

16 oz. shiitake mushrooms, stems removed
1 T. avocado oil
½ tsp. sea salt

Preheat the oven to 350°. Thinly slice the shiitake caps. Toss with avocado oil and sea salt until evenly coated.

Spread in a single layer on a parchment-lined baking sheet. Bake until crispy, about 20 to 30 minutes.

Serve immediately or use as a garnish for soups, salads, grain bowls or baked potatoes.

Tina Ellor's Grilled Chestnut Mushrooms

The naturally nutty flavor of chestnut mushrooms deepens over the grill, while a balsamic-honey glaze creates sweet, savory complexity. A hint of cinnamon and nutmeg adds warmth to this simple yet elegant side dish.

Serves 6

1 lb. chestnut mushrooms
3 T. olive oil
2 T. butter, melted



3 cloves garlic, minced
4 T. thick, sweet balsamic vinegar
1 T. honey
Ground cinnamon, to taste (optional)
Ground nutmeg, to taste (optional)
Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

Cut the mushrooms lengthwise into similar-sized pieces so they cook evenly. Note: the stems are edible.

In a small bowl, combine the olive oil, melted butter, garlic, balsamic vinegar, honey, cinnamon and nutmeg, if using. Warm the marinade slightly, if desired, then toss with the mushrooms to coat evenly.

Place the mushrooms in a foil grill pan and grill until tender and lightly crisp, turning occasionally. Season with salt and freshly ground black pepper before serving.

Spinach Salad with Roasted Royal Trumpet Mushrooms and Warm Cranberry Vinaigrette



One of the seasonal recipes featured in the cooking classes at The Woodlands at Phillips, this hearty entree salad tastes like autumn at the farmers market. Roasted royal trumpet mushrooms, butternut squash, creamy goat cheese and a warm cranberry vinaigrette come together in a colorful, nutrient-dense meal.

Serves 6 as a side salad or 2 as an entree

For the salad:

1 lb. royal trumpet mushrooms, cleaned and sliced
3 T. avocado or canola oil, divided
1 tsp. minced garlic
Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
2 C. butternut squash, in 1-inch cubes
1 container baby spinach, washed and dried
2 oz. fresh goat cheese, crumbled

For the vinaigrette:

1 T. canola oil
1 shallot, minced
1 clove garlic, minced
½ C. fresh cranberries
2 T. brown sugar
¼ C. red wine vinegar
Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

Preheat the oven to 450°. Place a large cast-iron skillet or enameled cast-iron skillet in the oven while it preheats.

Toss mushrooms in a bowl with half the oil, garlic, salt and pepper. Add to hot pan and roast for 10 to 15 minutes. Remove from oven and allow to cool.

Toss the butternut squash with remaining oil, garlic, salt and pepper. Place in a roasting pan and roast until tender.

While the squash is just finished roasting, prepare the warm salad dressing. Heat canola oil and sauté shallot and garlic in pan over medium heat until soft (do not allow to brown). Add cranberries and cook until they pop. Add brown sugar and vinegar and cook 1 minute more, stirring to make sure sugar crystals dissolve. Season with salt and pepper and gently whisk in olive oil.

To assemble salads: Arrange spinach on plates or platter, then arrange mushrooms, squash and goat cheese on top. Drizzle with warm dressing, divide cranberries evenly between servings, and serve immediately.

**The Woodlands at Phillips
Mushroom Casserole**

Gertrude Phillips' original recipe, dating back to the 1930s, was updated by the family in the 1970s. Their natural fiber, hearty texture and deep umami flavor give mushrooms a distinctly meaty character. As they bake, their savory juices are absorbed by the herb stuffing, creating a rich, satisfying side dish that's also very filling. Elegant enough for entertaining, easy enough for every day, and reheats beautifully.

Serves 8-10 as a side dish



3 lb. fresh mushrooms, cleaned and sliced
¾ lb. sharp cheddar cheese, grated
16 oz. Pepperidge Farm Herb Stuffing, dry (note: measure by weight, not standard package size)
½ stick butter, cubed
1¼ C. milk

Preheat oven to 350°. Cook the mushrooms in boiling water briefly and drain, reserving mushroom broth for other uses.

In a greased casserole dish, layer half the mushrooms, then half the cheese, and then half the dry stuffing mix. Repeat to get two layers of each ingredient.

Dot the butter over the top layer of stuffing, then pour the milk evenly over the casserole (be sure it's not too moist). Bake uncovered for 30 minutes.

Pasta con Funghi e Panna

Documented by Pliny the Elder, the historic pioppini mushroom (aka poplar fieldcap) has been cultivated since ancient Roman times. This traditional Northern Italian butter emulsion lets the pioppini's delicate woodland flavor shine, while campanelle pasta (bell-like flower shaped) captures every drop of the silky sauce.

Serves 6

6 T. unsalted butter, divided
3 cloves garlic, smashed
1½ lb. pioppini mushrooms, trimmed (or button, crimini or porcini)
3 oz. dry white wine
1½ lb. campanelle pasta (or fresh wide egg pasta like tagliatelle)
½ C. heavy cream

1 C. Grana Padano, finely grated (a hard, grainy Italian cheese with a nutty, savory, slightly sweet flavor)
Pinch of nutmeg
Flat-leaf parsley, chopped
Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Meanwhile, melt 3 T. butter over medium-low heat. Add the garlic and warm for 2 minutes without browning to infuse the garlic flavor into the butter.

Add the mushrooms and cook for 3 minutes, until tender. Discard the garlic. Pour in the wine, scraping up any browned bits, and simmer for 2 minutes, until reduced by half. Lower the heat.

Cook the pasta until 1 minute shy of al dente, reserving 1½ C. pasta water before draining.

Add the pasta to the mushrooms with the heavy cream and half the reserved pasta water. Stir vigorously over low heat for 1 minute until a glossy emulsion forms. Remove from the heat and stir in the remaining 3 T. butter, the Grana Padano, nutmeg and parsley.

Season with salt and pepper, adding additional reserved pasta water if needed to achieve a silky sauce. Serve immediately. ♦

Liz Tarditi is a chef and wine specialist with more than 30 years of experience in food, wine and event planning. She holds degrees from Villanova University and from a Seattle culinary arts program founded by a Certified French Master Chef, where she trained in a classic brigade-style kitchen. Liz later ran her own catering company and has worked as a wine specialist in Pennsylvania. She brings her training and lifelong passion for seasonal, approachable cooking to Brandywine Table.



Mastering Mushroom Care

Tina Ellor, the resident mycologist at Phillips Mushroom Farms, is both a scientist *and* a foodie. During our interview, she generously shared not only several of her favorite recipes, but also the absolute best pro tips and cooks' tricks on maximizing 'shroomy goodness. Read on!

The moment you bring your fresh selection home, immediately transfer them out of any plastic packaging and store them in a paper bag inside your refrigerator. Don't worry if they dry out slightly during storage. A little dehydration is actually preferable to the alternative of trapped moisture that causes fungi to quickly become slimy and unusable. Remember, dehydrated mushrooms are a pantry staple!

When you're ready to prep them for your meal, focus strictly on moisture control. If the mushrooms have lost too much water and look withered, a quick rinse under cold water can freshen them up right before cooking. But stop short of soaking mushrooms in a bowl of water, as their porous texture will rapidly absorb the excess liquid and ruin their texture.

The final step is moving them to the stove, as you should always aim to cook mushrooms rather than serving them raw. One technique Ellor shared was to first sauté the mushrooms in a little water that should completely evaporate. Then add the cooking oil to finish out your recipe.

Ellor said, "Cooking breaks down their cell walls, allowing your body to absorb more of their rich nutrients." Heat breaks down their tough chitin cell walls, making mushrooms significantly easier to digest and preventing the gassy stomach some people might get from raw pieces.

Having tested the technique for this column, I can attest the mushrooms are more flavorful, plumper and absorb less oil. More delicious and more nutritious? I'll take that!

