



*A "Sweet
Tooth" for
Hedgehogs*

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After the seemingly endless, steamy summers here in the Carolinas, fall is welcomed with a sigh of relief. When the cooler weather finally arrives, many of us adventurous fungi lovers grab a basket and head for the woods.

If you're out scouting for wild edibles as I will be these next several weeks, you might spot patches of golden mushrooms growing along the river or beneath the shade of stately beech trees. Maybe chanterelles? A quick peek under the cap identifies tiny "teeth" instead of gills. Good news! You've confirmed hedgehogs—a somewhat underappreciated and yet delicious mushroom whose discovery should thrill any forager.

Hedgehogs, or "sweet tooth" mushrooms, are easy to identify and a lucky culinary find. They will surprise you with their nutty and slightly sweet flavor, and woo you with their bright orange color and cute dimples. As a bonus, they're rich in vitamin D, potassium and iron, and like most mushrooms, also have anti-inflammatory and anti-bacterial properties. You'll love cooking with them. Hedgehog mushrooms are wonderful simply sautéed in fresh butter with a bit of garlic and a sprinkle of parsley on their own or served alongside grilled or roasted meats or game. They hold a firm consistency and readily absorb flavors making them a perfect addition to soups or stews, and are a good stand-in for almost any recipe calling for chanterelles.

The tiny teeth on the underside of their caps can make them somewhat difficult to clean (a small brush is handy), but the extra effort is well worth it. The tasty little spikes will detach during cooking, and leave tiny, flavorful bits of mushroom floating in your sauce or broth. (If your recipe calls for a clear sauce or soup you may want to choose another mushroom.)

Preserving your hedgehogs is easy. Although they're not a great choice for drying, unlike most mushrooms, they freeze raw beautifully, and thaw out in perfect form. They are also an ideal choice for pickling and conservas. A long-standing, traditional Italian method for preserving mushrooms and other vegetables, conserva is similar to pickling, although it differs with the addition of lots of good olive oil and



savory herbs. I encourage you to give this recipe a try the next time you have some special mushrooms you want to keep around and enjoy for a while!

Wild Mushroom Conserva

A dish as simple as this calls for good, quality ingredients. Use a fruity, extra virgin olive oil, a nice aged sherry vinegar and dense, button-type mushrooms. Hedgehogs are the perfect choice. Other meaty mushrooms will work well too, think buttons, cremini, chanterelles, lobster or porcini—a mixture makes it even more interesting. Chop all mushrooms into bite sized pieces and clean foraged or any soiled mushrooms with a quick water rinse just before cooking.

Make the conserva a day ahead and bring to room temperature or gently warm before serving. They're a perfect addition to an antipasto platter or served alongside roasted meats including chicken. Or whatever meat substitute works for you. Top grilled bread slices layered with whipped

chèvre for an easy first course, and pair with warm greens or salad for a quick, light meal. The mushrooms will keep for weeks in the refrigerator if you can resist the urge to snack on them!

Makes 4 cups

- 1 cup olive oil*
- 2–3 garlic cloves, thinly sliced*
- 2 shallots, thinly sliced*
- 1 heaping teaspoon fresh thyme leaves*
- 2 bay leaves*
- 1 1/2 teaspoons kosher salt*
- 2 pounds hedgehog or assorted mushrooms*
- 3–4 oil packed sun-dried tomatoes, drained and finely chopped*
- 3 tablespoons sherry vinegar*
- 3 tablespoons white wine vinegar*
- 1 teaspoon honey*
- 1/2 cup water*
- Fresh thyme sprigs*

Fresh lemon juice, chopped fresh mild herbs; parsley, basil, tarragon (optional)

Heat the oil in a deep saucepan with a lid over medium low heat, add the garlic, shallots, dried thyme, bay leaves and salt. Sauté until the shallots are translucent

and the garlic is beginning to turn golden.

Stir in the mushrooms and tomatoes then cover the pan. Cook for about 8–10 minutes, lifting the lid and stirring occasionally until the mushrooms have softened and given up their liquid—they will release a good amount of water.

Add the vinegars, honey and water, raise the heat to medium high and bring to a boil for about two minutes. Remove from heat, cool, and adjust seasoning with salt and pepper if necessary. Ladle into jars or a large, sealable glass container. The mushrooms should be covered with liquid, top with more oil or water if necessary and add a thyme sprig or two to each of the jars. At this point you can transfer the jars to a water bath

and process for canning, or store in the refrigerator for 3–4 weeks.

For a little extra zest, add a squeeze of fresh lemon juice with a sprinkle of chopped fresh herbs before serving.

Whipped Chèvre with Fresh Herbs

Spread this simple, light and creamy cheese on a warm piece of grilled sourdough then spoon on a helping of the the conserva. Delicious!

Save any leftovers to maybe top a burger, mix into a creamy pasta dish or add to scrambled eggs. Will keep for 3–4 days covered in the refrigerator.

*6 ounces goat cheese
4 ounces cream cheese, softened
1 tablespoon olive oil
1 teaspoon lemon juice
1 teaspoon honey
1 tablespoon minced fresh herbs
(parsley, thyme or basil)
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
to taste*

Add the goat cheese, cream cheese, olive oil and lemon juice to a food processor or blender and pulse until smooth or whisk together in a bowl by hand. Stir in the fresh herbs, season with salt and freshly grated black pepper to taste. Top with an extra drizzle of olive oil or honey if you like.





Cream of Corn and Hedgehog Soup with Sage and Pine Nuts

Hedgehog mushrooms shine in this silky, savory mushroom soup perfect for chilly fall days. Fresh corn and cream bring a luxurious sweetness to the soup, and toasted pine nuts add a bit of salty crunch and accentuate the nutty flavor of the mushrooms.

The soup is rich, a small bowl sized serving should satisfy most guests. If you prefer a hearty texture, reserve about a third of the sautéed mushrooms and stir into the soup after blending. Serve with crusty bread and a nice glass of full-bodied Chardonnay.

Makes about four 8-ounce servings

*3 tablespoons butter or olive oil
1 large shallot, finely chopped
2 garlic cloves, sliced*

*3 cups sliced hedgehog mushrooms
(about a half pound)
1 cup fresh or thawed frozen corn
3 cups stock (low-sodium chicken,
vegetable or light mushroom)
1/2 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon dry rubbed sage
Pinch of nutmeg
3 tablespoons dry sherry
1/2 cup heavy cream
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
Toasted and lightly salted pine nuts
Fried sage leaves (optional)*

Melt the butter in a deep saucepan over medium heat, add the shallot and garlic and cook until the shallots are softened and the garlic is just turning golden. Add the mushrooms and sauté until the mushrooms are lightly colored, cooked through and tender. (At this point you may want to reserve some of the mushrooms as a garnish for the finished soup). Stir in the corn, salt, sage, nutmeg and sherry and continue sautéing

for an additional minute or two. Pour in the stock, briefly stir, lower the heat and gently simmer for 8–10 minutes.

Let cool for a few minutes, then transfer to a blender or food processor and blend until smooth. Pour back into the saucepan over medium low heat, stir in the cream, and simmer for 5–6 minutes, thinning with a little additional stock if needed.

Taste and adjust seasoning with salt and pepper. Ladle into bowls, top with toasted pine nuts, fried sage, and reserved mushrooms. Add a drizzle of Sherry and enjoy!

Fried Fresh Herbs

Fried herbs add a nice finishing touch for soups and pasta dishes, vegetable dishes, too, anytime you want to add a little extra texture, flavor and drama to your dish. Just takes a few seconds, and it's so easy! You'll need:

- A neutral oil for frying; grape seed, peanut, canola or vegetable
- Fresh herbs of your choice: basil, sage, parsley, cilantro, or vegetable leaves: baby spinach, arugula leaves, etc.
- Paper towels and salt, fine sea salt preferably if you have it on hand.

Place a skillet or sauté pan on a stovetop on medium heat and pour a scant half inch of oil in the pan. When the oil begins to shimmer, sprinkle in the herbs—they will likely splatter a bit. Using long tongs or a slotted spoon, remove the herbs from the pan when they start to crisp and have just turned bright green; about 5–10 seconds. Don't let them brown!

Remove to paper towels to drain and lightly salt. Wrap any extra fried herbs in a paper towel and store in an airtight container. †

