

KNOW YOUR MUSHROOMS

A visual guide to all your favorite fungi

Mushrooms are extraordinary things. Some—notoriously, frighteningly—can poison us. And some of them—mysteriously, fortuitously—are delicious. Just exactly how our ancestors figured out the difference we'll most likely never know, but today we can rely on experts like Ian Garrone of Far West Fungi to discern between delicious and don't touch. Garrone comes from a family of mushroom hunters and growers, and his shop in the San Francisco Ferry Building overflows with familiar and exotic species, from the beige buttonlike cremini to the bright orange lobster mushroom, curled like a fist. We asked Garrone to give us a tour of some of his favorites in the edible fungal universe, complete with serving tips. And please note: This is a *buying* guide, not a foraging guide.

CHOW
FOOD. DRINK. FUN.

By Traci Vogel
Photographs by Chris Rochelle
(Images not actual size)



ABALONE

A relative of the oyster mushroom, and sometimes confused with the king trumpet, the abalone mushroom has a silky texture along with a mild, buttery flavor similar to the shellfish after which it's named. Restaurants occasionally substitute abalone mushrooms for porcini because they have fewer bug issues. Breaded and fried, they can stand in for real abalone.

Shelf life: 7 days



MAITAKE

(a.k.a. Sheep's Head, Ram's Head, Hen of the Woods)

This ruffled brown fungus grows at the base of trees, and can reach 50 pounds. Once considered the leading medicinal mushroom, it has gained culinary popularity because of its roasted chicken flavor and slightly meaty texture. It is rich in potassium, calcium, and magnesium, along with amino acids. Its Asian name means "dancing mushroom," because, the lore goes, whoever found it would dance for joy. "Cook for more than 10 minutes, almost 15," says Garrone, "and you've got yourself a delicious ingredient for risottos or stir-fries."

Shelf life: 10 days



MATSUTAKE

(a.k.a. Pine)

Extremely popular in Japan, matsutakes are best fresh and can sell for well over \$100 per pound. They are a fall variety in the States. Garrone describes the texture as "a little fibrous" and the flavor as "cinnamon pine." Look for a specimen that is still closed, i.e., one in which you can't see the gills. Matsutakes grow in sooty soil, so they'll usually need a lot of cleaning with a moist paper towel. They are aromatic and traditionally served in miso soup or rice dishes.

Shelf life: 3 to 14 days, depending on the quality



BLACK TRUFFLE

Brillat-Savarin called the truffle "the diamond of the kitchen." Valued for their aromatic qualities, truffles vary in taste and smell depending on their age and provenance. They're generally harvested in northern Italy, Spain, France, and Oregon. Flavors can range from earthy to green apple to savory garlic, while prices can range from \$400 to \$1,600 a pound. Look for very firm specimens. Usually shaved over warm food, truffles can also infuse foods; stored with eggs, for example, they will flavor the eggs.

Shelf life: 4 days (the aromatics will be lost after that)



MOREL

(a.k.a. Land Fish)

This springtime mushroom is highly prized for its earthy, smoky flavor and light, veallike texture. Because it's so strong in flavor, the morel works well with beef and in rich gravies. One popular fresh preparation is to flour and fry morels.

Shelf life: 5 days



CREMINI

(a.k.a. Crimini, Brown, Baby Bella)

The cremini, an immature portobello mushroom, graces tables worldwide. It's widely cultivated, has a mild flavor and a traditional mushroom texture, and basically "goes in everything," Garrone says.

Shelf life: 7 days



PORTOBELLO

(a.k.a. Portobella, Portabello, Portabella)

A full-grown cremini, the portobello is much larger, with a fleshier texture and muskier flavor. Because of this, it is a popular substitute for meat. Garrone recommends cooking portobellos whole, because "if you chop them up into small portions, you might as well just get browns."

Shelf life: 7 days



NAMEKO

These small orange mushrooms are easily identified by an unusual gelatinous coating that gives them an amber sheen. When you sauté them, the coating also acts as a good thickener for sauces or stews. Namekos have a sweet woodsy flavor and a silky, velvety texture, and they are very popular in Japan, where they are traditionally added to miso soup. Garrone recommends simply sautéing them with soy sauce and serving over rice.

Shelf life: 3 days



TREE OYSTER

There are a few different varieties of edible oyster mushrooms, including some that are pink or yellow in color, but the tannish-brown tree oyster is widely cultivated and common in grocery stores. Velvety soft in texture, it has a slightly sharp flavor that blends well with chicken and fish dishes. Don't cook tree oysters for more than four minutes, warns Garrone, or they'll be overdone.

Shelf life: 3 to 4 days



CHANTERELLE

Chanterelle refers to a family of mushrooms including the golden, yellowfoot, and white chanterelle, as well as the black trumpet mushroom. In the United States, chanterelles are in season during the fall, but Garrone says they're available 10 months out of the year worldwide so you have a good chance of finding them any time. With a firm texture and a subtle flavor featuring peppery apricot notes, they're great in cream sauces.

Shelf life: 10 days



BLACK TRUMPET

Garrone describes the texture of black trumpets as “very slight, almost like they’re not really there,” but the mushrooms’ aromatic, cheeselike flavor makes up for that. Chop them finely and add them to eggs, stews, or anything that needs a bold flavor pickup. Black trumpets are harvested in late fall and into winter across the United States.

Shelf life: 4 to 10 days, depending on moisture level



LOBSTER

The lobster mushroom gets its distinctive red color from a powdery parasitic fungus that grows on its surface, but don’t let that sway you: Its walnut-meat texture and mild seafood flavor have made it increasingly popular. Lobster mushrooms are better fresh than dried, and the best time to find them in the U.S. is September. Check them carefully for bugs. Garrone recommends brushing them with olive oil and garlic and grilling, or using them in lobster bisque instead of the real thing.

Shelf life: 7 days



KING TRUMPET

(a.k.a. French Horn, King Oyster)

In the same family as the oyster mushroom, the king trumpet is larger and denser. Its buttery, sweet flavor makes it a good choice for grilling and as an addition to stews. An “all-around good mushroom,” Garrone says.

Shelf life: 10 days



CAULIFLOWER

Picked in the late spring to early fall in Oregon and Washington, cauliflower mushrooms grow in clusters that can weigh as much as 35 pounds. They have the texture of egg noodles and a rainy, lemon-zest flavor, and can be used as a noodle substitute. Garrone recommends chopping and sautéing them as a side dish with herbs and cream. Look for specimens that are as white as possible, in clusters the size of a cauliflower head.

Shelf life: 7 days



FAIRY RING

This fall mushroom is imported from Europe and can be found dried year-round. Its cashewlike flavor makes it ideal for risottos and cream sauces. Garrone also recommends it with fish; he recently made a halibut dish with pecans and fairy ring mushrooms. The dried form of the mushroom has an intense flavor, so just use a little bit.

Shelf life: 1 year dried



PORCINI

(a.k.a. Cèpe, Bolete)

Fresh porcini have a limited seasonal window—they are harvested in the mountains in the spring and on the coast in the fall—but they can be found dried year-round. Eaten within two days of picking, they have a nice crunch and are good shaved over a salad. After two days, they should only be eaten cooked. Garrone recommends looking for fresh mushrooms that are as firm as possible. They’re apt to be buggy, so check them carefully. When dried, porcini take on a bolder, nuttier flavor.

Shelf life: 2 days fresh



SHIITAKE

The shiitake is native to East Asia, but its popularity has led to its cultivation worldwide. It is a good source of vitamin D, niacin, and potassium. Shiitakes are admired for their bold, savory, garlic flavor, and are so fleshy in texture that some people find them too chewy. “Cook for over 10 minutes,” recommends Garrone, and they’ll soften up.

Shelf life: 14 days



CANDY CAP

Generally only found dried (fresh specimens can sometimes be spotted in December or January in U.S. markets), the candy cap is prized for desserts. It has a distinctive sweet maple scent and flavor that go well in shortbread or cheesecake. Powdered, it can be added to pancake batter as a sweetener for diabetics. It can be expensive, but half an ounce is enough for a gallon of ice cream, says Garrone.

Shelf life: 2 to 3 days fresh, 1 year dried



SHIMEJI

(a.k.a. Buna-Shimeji [Brown], Bunapi-Shimeji [White], Hon-Shimeji, Beech)

Shimeji (pronounced shee-MAY-jhee) refers to about 20 different breeds of oyster mushrooms, the most common of which go by the names brown or white shimeji. Because they often grow on beech trees, they’re also known as beech mushrooms. With a firm texture and a delicate shellfishlike flavor, shimeji mushrooms are ideal for pairing with any kind of seafood.

Shelf life: 5 days



YELLOWFOOT CHANTERELLE

A true winter mushroom, the yellowfoot is sought for its earthy, woodsy flavor. Its delicate texture breaks down easily in sauces, and it is usually paired with veal or pork, as well as game dishes such as venison, rabbit, duck, or quail. Don’t confuse it with its relative, the golden chanterelle.

Shelf life: 4 days



PIOPPINI

A member of the shimeji family, pioppini mushrooms have a flavor similar to porcini but are more peppery. Their firm texture makes them a good addition to a stir-fry; you can use the whole mushroom, stem and all. Garrone says the pioppini has become many people’s favorite go-to mushroom because it has a lot of flavor yet is relatively inexpensive.

Shelf life: 7 days



WOOD EAR

Wood ear mushrooms are most commonly recognized as “the weird thing in hot-and-sour soup,” says Garrone. They aren’t very flavorful, but people love them for their firm yet chewy texture similar to seaweed. The fungus is also said to have medicinal qualities. While it can be eaten fresh, wood ear is most often found dried, and after soaking in warm water for 15 minutes, the dried variety reconstitutes so that it’s almost indistinguishable from fresh.

Shelf life: 1 year dried