

ld ceps and much easier to find, will animate the most humble pasta or meat dish

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leaving the grit behind; or strain the water through a muslin-lined sieve. Even if you are not using the water in the recipe, don't throw it out. Think of it as mushroom stock, and freeze it. Then it can be used in a sauce or soup, or to make a mushroom gravy.

Instead of water, you can soak the dried porcini in sherry or wine. I prefer a medium-sweet or dry sherry for this purpose. Use it cold, and leave the mushrooms to



SOPHIE
GRIGSON

soak for longer (at least half an hour).

Tagliatelle with porcini sauce

One of the easiest and most appetising ways of mixing dried and fresh mushrooms is in a creamy sauce for pasta. The sauce can be made in advance and reheated. For a bit more oomph, soak the porcini in sherry rather than water.

Serves 4

Ingredients: ½oz (15g) dried porcini, soaked
1 onion, chopped
1 clove garlic, finely chopped
2oz (55g) butter
12oz (340g) button mushrooms, finely chopped

¼ pint (150ml) double cream
squeeze of lemon juice
2tbs chopped parsley
salt, pepper

freshly grated nutmeg
12oz-1lb (340-450g) tagliatelle

Preparation: Chop the porcini and strain and reserve their soaking water. Cook onion and garlic in butter until soft, but not browned. Add porcini and their soaking water, and simmer until water in evaporated. Add chopped fresh mushrooms, salt and pepper, cover pan and stew for a further 20 minutes.

Remove lid and simmer until liquid has almost all evaporated. Add cream and nutmeg to mushroom sauce, and simmer together for 5 minutes, until thickened. Draw off the heat and stir in lemon juice and parsley. Taste and adjust seasoning.

Meanwhile, cook tagliatelle in boiling salted water until *al dente*. Fresh pasta should take just a few minutes; dried may take up to 10 minutes. Drain well, and serve with the mushroom sauce poured over it.

Baked halibut with porcini crust

In this recipe the mushrooms are mixed with breadcrumbs to make a crisp crust on top of pieces of halibut (if you can't get halibut, use the freshest cod).

Serves 4

Ingredients: ½oz (15g) dried porcini, soaked
1½oz (45g) fine white or brown breadcrumbs
leaves of 1 large sprig of thyme, chopped

3tbs olive oil
4 halibut steaks, weighing 6-8oz (170-225g) each
salt and pepper

Preparation: Season the halibut with salt and pepper. Drain the porcini and strain the soaking liquid. Chop the porcini finely and mix with the breadcrumbs, thyme, salt and pepper. Stir in the olive oil, mixing well to make sure each crumb has soaked up its fair share. Press half the mixture on to one side of each steak, covering the surface thickly. Lay the steaks, crust upward, in an oiled, shallow, oven-proof dish. Spoon about 4tbs of the soaking liquid around them.

Roast at 200C/400F/gas mark 6 for about 20 minutes, until the crust has browned and the fish is cooked through.

Roast chicken with porcini

This is such a good way of lifting ordinary roast chicken right out of the ordinary, and of keeping it moist while it cooks. Butter, flavoured with porcini, thyme and lemon is smeared between the flesh and the skin before the chicken goes into the oven. And that's all there is to it.

Serves 4-6

Ingredients: ½oz (15g) porcini, soaked
2tbs chopped parsley
1 clove garlic, roughly chopped
finely grated zest 1 lemon
juice of ½ lemon
2oz (55g) butter, softened
1 small onion, quartered

1 free-range chicken
salt and pepper

Preparation: Drain the porcini and pat dry. Save the soaking water (strained first) for another dish, or for making gravy. Chop porcini, parsley, garlic and lemon zest together very finely. Mash with the lemon juice, butter, salt and pepper.

Gently wiggle your fingers under the skin of the chicken, easing it away from the flesh on the breast and upper thighs without pulling it right off.

Now — and I find this easiest with fingers, but you may prefer to use a spoon as well or instead — push the flavoured butter between skin and flesh, smearing it as evenly as possible. Put the onion quarters inside the cavity of the chicken.

Weigh the chicken and calculate the roasting time. Allow 15 mins per pound (450g), plus an extra 10 minutes. Roast at 220C/425F/gas mark 7, basting frequently with its own juices. If it threatens to burn, cover with foil.

