

Foraging for Fall Foods

By Carol Harvie Yamaguchi

Autumn is an eagerly anticipated season for food lovers worldwide. As cool winds rustle the falling leaves and patio furniture is packed away, nature is ripening its cornucopia of nutritious and delectable offerings.

Root vegetables such as burdock, parsnips, celery root, carrots, potatoes, turnips, beets and radishes abound. Squash in all its varied bulbous shapes and shades present a sensual autumnal display. Orchards are fragrant with ripened apples and pears, while grapes, olives, and persimmons wait to be picked. Earthier foods that make an eagerly awaited appearance are truffles and exotic looking mushrooms, filled with nutrition and flavour absorbed from the forest. Shiny chestnuts are ready to be gathered as are many other nuts and late berries. Seasoning vegetables like onions, garlic, ginger, mustard and peppercorns burst with their distinctive spices at this time of the year. Chrysanthemum leaves are needed to season many Asian dishes. Rice that has been gradually ripening is now ready for harvest by the beginning of October.

Not to be overlooked are the wild foods that can be foraged in the forests, fields, and mountains: dandelion, chickweed, plantain, nettles, fiddleheads, wild leek, wild ginger, water parsley, rosehips, wild nuts, mushrooms and berries. Foraging for wild foods is a traditional means of gathering food from nature. It is an accepted pastime for many foodies in Asia, Europe and the United Kingdom, and is becoming more popular in Canada as many people turn to wild foods to supplement their menus.

Mushrooms are eagerly sought after by many cultures. Indeed the wild mushroom is a multi-million dollar industry in British Columbia that is fueled by ethnic cuisines and ever increasing culinary demands. The European cuisines of course favor the unique taste and texture of chanterelle, porcini and morels. Yellow chanterelles, in particular, can demand a high market price. Matsutake (pine) mushrooms, however, are the most highly prized of the mushrooms. Perhaps the most important autumnal flavour in Japan, this mushroom is bought at an exorbitant price as it is a traditional food and gift in Japanese culture. Matsutake gohan is an aromatic rice dish made with these mushrooms and plays a highly revered role in Japanese menus.

Berries and rosehips are plentiful in British Columbia. Rosehips are extremely high in vitamin c and are delicious made into jam, tea, jellies, and baked goods. Wild berries like Elderberry (deep rich flavour), Huckleberry (sweet), Buffaloberry (marmalade flavour), and Saskatoon berries (creamy sweet) are found all over the province along lakes, streams and in the mountains.

Foraging for wild foods can be challenging due to pollution, land clearing, construction, and competition from humans or wild animals. Mushroom picking can sometimes require

ultimate tact and diplomacy when confronted by other pickers who have staked out their territories. Foraging also becomes adventurous in the mountains when gathering the same berries that the bears are also hungrily searching for. Although there is a great deal of primal satisfaction gained from foraging in the wilds, we can always resort to the bountiful organic harvests on display at the many farmers' markets in British Columbia. Foodies need not get their boots muddy, their tempers frayed, or their faces scratched by brambles; instead they can forage for dandelion greens, wild berries or matsutake amid atmospheric market stalls with steaming cups of coffee and fragrant flaky pastries in hand.

Grilled Matsutake Mushrooms

5 fresh matsutake

¼ c soy sauce

¼ c rice vinegar

4 TBSP mirin

3 TBSP sesame oil

2 TBSP chili oil

3 cloves garlic, minced

Clean matsutake gently with mushroom brush.

Trim stalks and slice mushrooms ¼ inch thick.

Whisk other ingredients to form marinade.

Marinate mushrooms for ½ hour.

Grill quickly, brushing with marinade.

Mushrooms are ready when golden brown.

Delicious alone with a squeeze of citrus.

Fabulous in a salad or with grilled meat.