

BUSYCOOK

Stuff it for vegetarians

Mushrooms, fresh sweetcorn and mozzarella cheese make a satisfying meatless meal

MUSHROOMS are nature's gift to the vegetarians. These wonderful fungi come in a large variety of shapes, sizes and texture – so helpful for the inventive vegetarian cook.

I've been meaning to introduce a vegetarian dish in this column in response to all your e-mails. So finally, here it is, a dish created specially for those who don't eat meat – using my favourite food, mushrooms.

These tasty nuggets are very easy to make, and you can serve them as a main meal, or even as canapes for a party.

Although there is absolutely no meat in them, they are, nonetheless, very satisfying.

Choose large portobello mushrooms if you are using them as a main course. I used large white button mushrooms for my version. Fresh shiitake mushrooms will work just as well.

The only luxury in this dish was fresh mozzarella cheese. I buy some whenever I'm in one of

the better supermarkets.

I saw some really nice, fresh mozzarella at Carrefour, for example, and bought two bags. They are a little pricey, but

the taste and texture of good mozzarella cannot be substituted.

You never waste mozzarella. A thin slice on buttered bread quickly popped into the toaster oven is one of the simplest and best breakfasts.

Or add a little spaghetti sauce for an instant toast "pizza".

Back to our stuffed mushrooms, the filling is just fresh sweetcorn, chopped mushroom stems and a handful of tasty breadcrumbs flavoured with fresh-ground black pepper, salt and a pinch of chilli flakes.

You can choose to moisten the mixture with an egg, or just a little milk or even water.

One note on the great debate of whether you wash mushrooms or wipe them. There is divided opinion on this even among the culinary royalty.

I usually give them a quick rinse if there is too much dirt stuck to the caps. But I do dry them quickly on kitchen paper so they don't get soggy.

As anyone who have cooked mushrooms know, the caps will sweat water, turn limp and lose their shapes if they absorb too much water.

The best way to cook the stuffed mushrooms is in an oven, but if you don't have one, cook them in batches in the toaster oven. But watch them carefully.



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Stuffed Mushrooms with Sweetcorn and Mozzarella

Ingredients:

20 large mushrooms
(Button mushrooms or shiitake)
1 fresh corn on the cob
100 gm fresh breadcrumbs
200 gm fresh mozzarella cheese (grated)
A little milk
Dried chilli flakes (or paprika)

Method:

1. Preheat oven to 180 deg C. Clean mushrooms, break off stems and chop them up for the stuffing. Leave whole mushroom caps aside.

2. Peel husk from corn, remove corn silk. Using a sharp knife, cut off sweetcorn from the cob.
3. Combine breadcrumbs, chopped mushroom stems, sweetcorn and the milk. Season with salt and pepper. Set the stuffing aside for a few minutes to let it absorb the liquid.
4. Dust mushroom caps with a little cornflour. Stuff each mushroom with a generous spoonful of filling.
5. Carefully top stuffed mushrooms with the grated mozzarella, tamping it down slightly.

6. Place stuffed mushrooms on a baking tray. Sprinkle dried chilli flakes and a little salt on top.
7. Bake for 15 minutes or until cheese melts and turns golden. Serve hot.

BREADCRUMBS: Buy ready-made or use the Japanese panko. I usually gather odds and ends from left-over bread and save them in the freezer until I need some. Just crush the frozen breadcrumbs with a rolling pin or a tin can. They break up easily. Try not to use flavoured breads. White bread, milk bread or wholemeal bread still work better.



Maggi

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