

## COOKING GOD'S OWN FOOD IN GOD'S OWN COUNTRY – THE EASY WAY

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### ABSTRACT

Mushrooms are the most exquisite of the gastronomic treasures of the world and were in use for edible purpose from time immemorial. With more than 38,000 varieties mushrooms are popular not only in restaurants but in homes too. Each locality is blessed with a natural mushroom flora which varies according to climate vegetation etc. However in the world market the most important mushroom is the button mushroom. But owing to the sophisticated technology and cost of cultivation the more popular ones cultivated are the oyster mushrooms and the tropical milky mushrooms. Mushrooms are best when consumed fresh. Most of the recipes can be prepared with any of the edible varieties but the recipes presented here are prepared using oyster mushrooms (*Pleurotus*), milky mushrooms (*Calocybe*), Jew's ear mushrooms (*Auricularia*) and button mushrooms (*Agaricus* sp.).

A variety of soups can be prepared with oyster mushrooms. Soups can be plain mushroom soup or sweet corn mushroom soup, tomato mushroom soup, cauliflower mushroom soup etc. It can also be blended with the mixed vegetable stock or chicken stock to suit the occasion.

A variety of snacks like burger, cutlets, fritters etc. can be prepared with milky and oyster mushrooms. Mushroom preparations also serve as excellent main dishes and side dishes. Mushrooms can also be cooked with fish and meat products. The oyster mushrooms and milky mushrooms are best for these preparations.

Jew's ear mushrooms are excellent for wine preparations.

The main ingredients and easy method of preparation of more than a dozen recipes with superb illustrations are dealt with in this paper.

**Key words :** Oyster mushroom; soups; Jew's ear mushroom; milky mushroom; button mushroom.

### INTRODUCTION

Kerala State is blessed with a diversity of climate and is rich in its natural flora and diversity of crops cultivated. Mushrooms are known for their high quality protein and the same in fresh mushrooms is twice as high as that of vegetables [3]. Modern mushroom cultivation produces more protein per unit area and gives higher productivity than any other form of agriculture.

The State of Kerala exudes a rustic charm and is characterized by elegant coconut palms and lusting paddy fields. The state has a captivating variety of back waters and lakes. Kerala - Gods Own Country enjoys unique geographical features, an equable climate, long shoreline with serene beaches, tranquil stretches of emerald backwaters, lush hill stations and exotic wildlife,

waterfalls, sprawling plantations and paddy fields, enchanting art forms, magical festivals, historic and cultural monuments.

Though Kerala is one of the small states in the country there prevail all types of climate at any time in the year. The cultivation of the oyster mushrooms has gained much popularity because it can be grown round the year at any place in Kerala. Milky mushrooms are popularly known as the summer edible mushroom. Recently the medicinal mushroom *Auricularia* is gaining popularity.

Use of mushrooms as food and medicine have been found in the inscriptions, sculptures and scriptures of many ancient civilization. Mushrooms were believed by the Greeks to give strength to their warriors while Romans regarded them as the “Food for the Gods” [1]. Undoubtedly mushrooms are basically consumed for their texture flavour and aroma.

It was the French during the reign of Louis XIV who first started cultivating mushrooms systematically. Even before that people who lived in caves used to collect mushrooms from the wild and consume them. But collection from the wild often lead to poisoning owing to their inability to distinguish the poisonous ones from the edible varieties [2]. But now with the availability of choice species vulnerable for cultivation mushrooms which were once considered as a delicacy or as the food of gods has now become the food of common man.

The protein in mushroom is considered to be of high quality containing all the essential amino acids required for an adult individual. Some of the amino acids like tryptophan and lysine which are absent in vegetable protein are present in mushroom protein. They are also known to be excellent sources of riboflavin nicotinic acid and pantothenic acid. Minerals such as calcium phosphorus and potassium are present along with a fair quantity of copper and iron all of which are essential for the formation of bones, teeth and also good for eye sight [7].

Mushrooms blend well with most of the vegetables and spices to form delicious items of food [4], [5]. Salads, soups, snacks, main dishes, side dishes, pickles and even sweet preparations are possible with mushroom. It can also be sun dried and stored or marketed as mushroom powder. In India mushroom dishes can be divided into North Indian dishes and South Indian dishes [8]. North Indian dishes are mostly prepared with button mushrooms while in South India oyster mushrooms are preferred.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The oyster mushrooms used for the study were procured from the All India Co-ordinated Research Project on Mushroom laboratory of the Institute at the Vellayani Campus. Milky mushrooms and *Auricularia* were collected fresh from the fields as well as from experimental beds. The button mushrooms were bought from the local traders. The mushrooms were thoroughly washed in running water before preparation of recipes. For certain recipes mushrooms were used as such but for others it was sliced before use.

The following dishes were prepared using Oyster mushrooms (*Pleurotus* sp.), Button mushrooms (*Agaricus* sp.), Jew’s ear mushrooms (*Auricularia* sp.) and Milky mushroom (*Calocybe* sp.) [6], [10].

The ingredients and method of preparation are dealt with in detail.

### **Recipe 1. SWEET CORN MUSHROOM SOUP**

#### **Ingredients**

Mushrooms	-	200 g
Shallots	-	3 g
Butter	-	30 g

Corn flour	-	1 tsp.
Ground Cardamom	-	¼ tsp.
Ground pepper	-	¼ tsp.
Milk	-	2 cups
Egg	-	1
Salt	-	to taste

### **Method**

Melt butter fry onions and chopped mushrooms mix the corn flour in two cups of mil and boil for ten minutes in shallow pan. Before removing from fire add beaten eggs white sprinkle pepper powder, cardamom, salt and serve hot.

### **Recipe 2. MUSHROOM VADA**

#### **Ingredients**

Oyster mushrooms	-	200 g
Channa dal	-	100 g
Shallots (shredded)	-	50 g
Chilli powder	-	2 tsp.
Ginger shredded	-	1 tsp.
Asafoetida powder	-	¼ tsp.
Salt to taste		
Oil for deep frying		

### **Method**

Soak the channa dal for 6 hours. Wash the mushrooms, drain and remove the stipe from the pileus. Grind the dal very coarsely. Mix in the chilli powder, shallots, ginger, asafoetida powder along with a pinch of salt. Uniformly coat the surface of the mushrooms with this mixture and deep fry in oil.

### **Recipe 3. MUSHROOM BIRIYANI**

#### **Ingredients**

Long grained fine rice	-	1 cup
Mushrooms sliced	-	1 cup
Ghee	-	50 g
Onion	-	2
Capsicum	-	2
Chilli powder	-	1 tsp.
Coriander powder	-	1 tsp.
Turmeric powder	-	a pinch
Ground masala paste (cinnamon: clove : cardamom 1:2:2)	-	1 tsp.
Pepper	-	½ tsp.
Salt to taste		

## **Method**

Wash the rice in water, add 3 pieces each of cinnamon, cardamom and clove with 2 cups of water and salt.

Pressure cook for 15 minutes and keep aside. Fry the onions, capsicum, add the mushrooms marinated with turmeric powder, chilly powder, coriander powder and ground masala paste. Sprinkle water, salt to taste and cook for 5 minutes. Mix with the cooked rice, garnish with fried onions and nuts bake and serve hot.

## **Recipe 4. SIMPLE MUSHROOM STEW**

### **Ingredients**

Button mushrooms	-	200 g
Carrot (cooked)	-	100 g
Peas (boiled)	-	100 g
Potato (cooked)	-	100 g
Ginger grated	-	1 tsp.
Green chillies	-	2
Onion sliced	-	2
Turmeric powder	-	a pinch
Masala powder (cinnamon:clove:cardamom 1:2:2)	-	1 tsp.
Oil	-	2 tsp.
Coconut milk (first extract and second extracts)	-	2 cups each
Salt	-	to taste
Curry leaves	-	a few

### **Method**

Wash and chop the mushrooms. Heat oil in a pan, add the mustard seeds, and curry leaves. After the mustard seeds splitter, saute the onions, green chillies and grated ginger.

Add the chopped mushrooms, turmeric powder salt and bring to boil in 2 cups of second extract of coconut milk. When it boils add masala, potatoes, carrot and peas. Add the remaining two cups of first extract of coconut milk and simmer in moderate heat for 5 minutes.

## **Recipe 5. MUSHROOM MUSSEL FRY**

### **Ingredients**

Mushrooms (thickly sliced)	-	200 g
Mussels (Medium sized)	-	25 nos.
Ginger	-	2 pieces of 1" size
Garlic	-	6 flakes
Pepper	-	½ tsp.
Chilli powder	-	2 tsp.

Onion	- 2
Coriander powder	- 1 tbsp.
Salt to taste	

### **Method**

Wash and scrub the mussels. Boil in water for 10 minutes. Discard the shells removing the beards attached to the flesh and keep aside. Put ginger and garlic and blend fairly in 200 ml of water. Heat oil, saute onions till translucent add the paste from the blender along with pepper powder, chilli and coriander powder. Stir fry for 3 minutes. Add the mushroom and mussels. Mix well and bring to boil. Lower heat and let mussels and mushrooms steam for 15 minutes. Serve immediately while hot.

### **Recipe 6. HONEY COATED MUSHROOM DOUGH NUTS**

#### **Ingredients**

Mushroom powder	- 100 g
Rice flour	- 50 g
Honey	- 100 ml.
Grated coconut	- 100 g
Molasses	- 100 g

#### **Method**

Fry the mushroom powder and rice flour along with grated coconut in low heat. Mix well with molasses, make into balls and smear with honey to make delicious dough nuts.

### **Recipe 7. AURICULARIA WINE**

Mushroom (Auricularia)	- 500 g
Sugar	- 500 g
Wheat kernels	- 100 g

#### **Method**

Wash clean the mushrooms in running water, allow to dry and slice. Arrange one third of mushrooms in the bottom layer of a clean glass jar. Sprinkle the sugar over the top along with wheat kernels. Then arrange the next lot over the first one sprinkle sugar, wheat kernels. For first 15 days allow for aerobic fermentation then tightly close the lid keep undisturbed for a month. Then strain the contents into clean bottle and serve as such.

### **Recipe 8. AURICULARIA FRITTERS**

#### **Ingredients**

Fresh Mushrooms (Auricularia)	- 500 g
Besan flour	- 300 g
Chilly powder	- 3 tsp.
Asafoetida powder	- 1 tsp.

Oil - 350 ml.  
Salt to taste

### **Method**

Wash the mushrooms as such and leave to drain off water. Make a thick paste with besan, water, chilly powder, asafoetida powder and a pinch of salt. Dip the mushrooms in the batter one by one to get a smooth coating. Deep fry till golden brown.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

About 70 different recipes have been standardized at the College of Agriculture, Vellayani, Kerala, India. Most of the recipes have been prepared with oyster mushrooms and a few recipes with button mushrooms, milky mushrooms and Jew's ear mushrooms.

The feasibility of *Auricularia* in recipes was explored during a post graduate study and it gave tremendous result. "Auricularia wine" and "Auricularia fritters" were excellent preparations. It has good keeping quality too. Sale of value added products like soup powder and pickles are also gaining popularity.

Lip smacking soups can be prepared using fresh and dried mushrooms [12]. Soups can be either plain mushroom soup or mixed with other vegetables like tomato, cauliflower etc. Ready to use soup mix is being standardized which enable us to prepare the soup in a couple of minutes. The recipe of the soup given here is very simple and at the same time very tasty.



Sweet corn Mushroom soup



Mushroom Vada



Mushroom stew



Mushroom macaroni curry



Mushroom mussel fry



Mushroom mutton mince



Mushroom kofta curry



Mushroom peas masala

**Table 1:** Composition of cultivated mushrooms and some common vegetables

Name	Calories	Moisture	Protein	Fat	Carbohydrate	Protein % (dry wt.)
Greenpeas	98	74.3	6.7	0.4	17.7	26.1
Beans	35	88.9	2.4	0.2	7.7	21.6
Cauliflower	25	91.7	2.4	0.2	4.9	28.8
Potato	83	73.8	2.0	0.1	19.1	7.6
Beet root	42	87.6	1.6	0.1	9.6	12.9
Celery	18	93.7	1.3	0.2	3.7	20.6
Mushroom	16	91.1	2.4	0.3	4.0	26.9

A large variety of snacks can be prepared using Oyster mushrooms. These are very easy to prepare and also affordable for the common people.

Mushrooms go well with fish too. A variety of main dishes and side dishes can be prepared using them. “Mushroom shark relish”, “Mushroom roe delight”, Mushroom mussel fry” etc. are very tempting dishes. Mushroom curry along with boiled tapioca is an excellent dish to be served for lunch.

Egg savouries using mushrooms are quite common in India. Eggs have been found to enhance the taste of mushrooms. “Mushroom mint omlette”, “Mushroom egg curry” etc. are very delicious milky mushroom preparations [11].

As part of the technology transfer, mushroom trainings were imparted to beneficiaries identified by the Centre. During the trainings various preparations of mushrooms were consumed by trainees and based on the characteristics such as appearance, colour, flavour, taste, texture and overall acceptability they are graded. The best recipes selected by them are

promoted. Some of the recipes narrated here are the ones selected exclusively for their taste and overall acceptability. Besides some of the recipes displayed in the poster have won prizes at competitions sponsored by private food marketing and non governmental organizations (NGO's).

## CONCLUSION

The changing food habit, increasing health consciousness have led to a gradual increase in demand of fresh and processed mushrooms among urban and rural consumers. However such products must suit the taste and choice of common buyers. The mushroom recipes have always been a gourmet's delight. It not only provides delicious dishes but also a very balanced cholesterol free and almost fat free items. Thus there remain ample scope for popularizing mushroom cultivation and development of mushroom based recipes in God's own country.

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