

WILD GAME RECIPES

November 2010

CREAM OF WILD MUSHROOM WILD RICE SOUP



The Hen of the Woods (Grifola frondosa) also known as Maitake, can grow as large as forty or fifty pounds, but most commonly ten to twenty. They are usually found at the base of dying/dead oak trees or dead maple trees and in my case, at the base of a living old cottonwood. Hens have a fabulous nutty flavor.



Fall is maybe my favorite time of the year. It is time to don a sweatshirt, but not so cold that you have to wear a coat. The fall leaves crunching beneath my feet and cool crisp evening campfires are so enjoyable. Hunting season is beginning, the pumpkins and corn are ready for picking and Mother Nature has taken out her paint brushes to fill the landscape with brilliant colors. It is also some of the best of times to pick mushrooms. This year was no exception. With lots of moisture, warm days and cool nights, I hoped my mushroom patch would be overloaded. My favorite mushroom find is "The Hen of the Woods". My mushroom gold mine is on the other side of my river and by now the water is quite cool. In the past, I have only picked ten to fifteen pounds of these delicious wild mushrooms and could easily tuck them inside a couple of large plastic grocery bags. This year around the usual picking time of mid September, I waded across the river ... only to find one tiny hen ... all of maybe two pounds. I was very disappointed, but I sliced her off and put her in my bag. Fall continued to be damp and cool, but there was no frost. I had been talking to some friends who also "mushroom" and they told me that they had been picking quite a few even though it was getting late in the season ... early October. The river water was really getting chilly, but I decided to check my hen tree again. Once again, I waded across the river with my sharp knife and a couple of plastic bags. As

I pushed through the brush, I almost shrieked with glee! There they were ... huge ... like I have never seen before! The first one was so big that I couldn't even fit it in the bag. As I circled the tree, I couldn't contain myself. The base was literally covered with them. I took what I could and went back to my home to get two heavy duty garbage bags ... I don't think I even felt the ice cold water. I could barely lift the mushrooms. I carefully carried the two bags of "Hens" one by one to the waters edge and floated them across. I had harvested over sixty pounds of mushrooms. What a fantastic day and now it was time to share!!

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generally are bug free inside the flesh. When harvesting, make sure you leave plenty of the base so the spores can re-propagate for the next year. You will usually find them in early September to late October, as they are triggered by the first cold nights at the end of the summer. They vary in color, from pure white to tan to brown to gray. They are unmistakable at sight with their large overlapping leaf like fronds in large clusters that get larger with time ... much like the tail of a chicken ... hence ... "Hens of the Woods". The stem is thick and firm and also very edible. I have found them very easy to clean by simply pulling them apart and rinsing them in water. Shake them off and store them in a freezer bag without any par-boiling, etc. These wonderful "shrooms" hold their texture and density after cooking. They are very meaty ... wonderful over a steak, but my favorite is **Cream of Wild Mushroom Wild Rice Soup**.

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Cream of Wild Mushroom Wild Rice Soup

2 ½ pounds wild mushrooms of your choice (Hens are my personal favorite)
1 ½ cups chopped leeks
2 bunches chopped scallions (a healthy ½ cup)
1 cup wild rice
1 stick salted butter
8 cups smoked turkey stock (but you can use regular of chicken stock as well)
2 cups heavy whipping cream
12 oz good quality ale
4 Tbsp corn starch
Sea salt to taste
White pepper to taste
½ tsp garlic granules
3 sprigs fresh rosemary, leaves only
4-5 sprigs fresh thyme, leaves only
1 cup fresh parsley, tops only

- 1) Place wild rice, beer and 2 ½ cups stock in a pot and bring to a boil. Stir and cover and let simmer on low for 45 to 50 minute ... or tender to your taste.
- 2) Clean mushrooms and chunk/chop.
- 3) Melt butter in oversized skillet and sauté mushrooms, leeks and scallions until tender. Season with garlic granules and salt and pepper taste.
- 4) With one cup cream, dissolve cornstarch and set aside
- 5) Finely chop rosemary, thyme, and parsley in spice grinder (best to release all the flavors)
- 6) In large stock pot put remaining chicken stock and cream. Add cream with cornstarch and bring to a light boil. Add sautéed mushroom mixture and wild rice and fresh spices. Lightly simmer 30 minute ... DO NOT BOIL!



Pictured are Hens sautéed in butter. You can chop them up, but I love to leave them in their natural length. A little garlic is also great and a sprinkling of grated Asiago or Parmesan is too.