



By Peggy Crum, MA, RD, Health4U Nutritionist

I grew up mushroom hunting in the woods of central Indiana, a hotbed of activity in early spring. Sometimes my family ventured to northwest Michigan. Morel mushrooms were the main attraction. I did not [learn how to identify other safe-to-eat mushrooms](#). So, as much as I know morels, I do not know maitakes. Without knowing the source as reliable, I would not even consider consuming a wild mushroom.

Maitakes, one of autumn's finest fungi, have several nicknames: Hen of the Woods, Rams Head, Sheep's Head, Cloud Mushroom, and Dancing Mushroom. If maitake hunters are anything like morel hunters, the latter name comes from the excitement generated by finding one! Other nicknames come from their feathery appearance. Each maitake is a small to large cluster of rippling feathers-shape, not a typical mushroom cap-shape. Find a thorough description [here](#). Maitakes grow in the wild from September through November near oak trees.

Wild or gourmet (cultivated) mushrooms such as maitakes are available at farmers markets and supermarkets. Fresh maitakes will be firm and dry. If they're in a plastic bag when you buy them, transfer them to a paper bag as soon as you get home. Store in the refrigerator for up to four days. You may have heard not to wash mushrooms, but if they're dirty, a brief rinse just before cooking is a good idea.

Maitakes are intensely flavorful, the very definition of umami. Their texture is unique from other mushrooms. Rather than squeaky and firm, maitakes have a light, delicate texture. And rather than slicing or chopping, maitake has pull apart leaves or feathers making them quite easy to prepare. Not to get in the way of maitake's stand-alone flavor, sautéing is a great way to go. Begin by heating your pan thoroughly before adding oil or butter and the pulled-apart leaves. Add salt and pepper; sauté until golden brown. Serve as a side dish, or to garnish pasta, risotto, or eggs. Large maitakes can be sliced and cooked like a steak.

RECIPE for health

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featured food:

MAITAKE MUSHROOMS

Egg Foo Yung Maitake

By Executive Chef Jason Strotheide, Residential Dining Services

Serves 6

For the Omelets:

- 2 T sesame oil
- 3 T vegetable oil
- 6 large eggs
- ½ t ground white pepper
- 8 ounces maitake mushrooms, stemmed and chopped
- 1 medium yellow onion, cut in 1 inch julienne
- 3 oz. Chinese eggplant (about 2), cut in half lengthwise, then ¼ inch bias cut
- 2 T minced fresh garlic
- ¼ c thin bias cut green onions

For the Sauce:

- 2 T granulated sugar
- 1 T hoisin sauce
- 3 T sherry wine
- 2 t vegetable base (find in soup aisle of grocery store next to bouillon)
- 3 T tamari soy sauce
- 1 ½ c water
- 2 T + 2 t cornstarch

Combine sauce ingredients in saucepan and mix until smooth. Bring to simmer over medium heat, stirring every few minutes until thickened. Keep warm until ready to serve.

Combine oils in small container; set aside. Combine eggs and white pepper in bowl and whisk until smooth; set aside.

Heat nonstick pan or griddle over medium high heat. In small batches, heat oil and sauté mushrooms, onions, eggplant, garlic, and green onion for 2 to 3 minutes until vegetables begin to soften. Add whisked egg and cook as you would an omelet, flipping it over to lightly brown both sides.

Ladle sauce over the omelet and serve with rice and soft flat bread such as flour tortillas or scallion pancakes.