

MUSHROOM NEWSLETTER

19 May 2009

The weather may be a touch chilly and damp, but it is perfect for fungi. The St Georges are still in full swing and should continue to be available for at least another fortnight. Although I don't think these dry particularly well, they do freeze – just flash-fry them in hot oil with a little garlic and chopped shallot. I then put them in old yoghurt pots – allowing me the easy removal of a two- to four-person portion.



St Georges store well flash-fried with garlic and shallots, then frozen in small quantities for ease of use

The first big challenge, of course, is to find a patch. This can be far from simple. Although an extremely long-lived grassland species (there are rings in the Midlands which date back to the Middle Ages), these are increasingly scarce across much of the country. Not only has most of our pasture been turned over to arable farming, but almost all the grass that remains has been 'improved', usually by ploughing and re-seeding with fast-growing rye grasses. This, of course, destroys the mycelium, but even in those places where ancient pasture still exists, it has generally been treated with fertilisers and herbicides: again spelling disaster for these delicate mushrooms. That said, St Georges are widely distributed and where they do occur, they can grow in large numbers – as I found to my delight this morning.



This large white mushroom is generally very visible, but it can be hidden by lush spring plant growth

So once you've found your mushrooms: what next? Well I think their strong mealy flavour goes particularly well with white meats and dairy. Personally I think it's difficult to beat a wild mushroom risotto (but I get laughed at here because I say that about almost every species), but St Georges also work well in a quiche. Antonio Carluccio, on the other hand, recommends them simply sautéed and seasoned with garlic, lemon juice, parsley and black pepper. I would endorse this, but might make it a little more unusual by substituting wild garlic (ramsoms) for the parsley.

If this talk is making your mouth water, do have another look at my website which now contains not only a monthly wildlife profile and feature on a (generally non-fungal) wild ingredient, but also a seasonal mushroom recipe. And if you have any comments on the site or constructive suggestions, I would love to hear from you. On the same lines, do forward this newsletter to anyone you think might be interested – I have 900 regular subscribers, but would love to get into four figures.



The St Georges are still both plentiful and in good condition – five kg picked in 10 minutes on 19 May

Meanwhile, there's great news for mushroom fans from Downunder. Australian researchers report Chinese women are much less likely to suffer from breast cancer thanks to a diet rich in green tea and mushrooms.

"We concluded that higher dietary intake of mushrooms decreased breast cancer risk in pre- and post-menopausal Chinese women, and an additional decreased risk of breast cancer from the joint effect of mushrooms and green tea was observed," says researcher Min Zhang, from the University of Western Australia. "The risk of breast cancer significantly declined with the highest intake of dietary mushrooms," she said, adding fresh and dried mushrooms were equally effective.

The study, published in the *International Journal of Cancer*, indicates a daily intake of as little as 10 grams (less than one button mushroom) is beneficial, while those women eating most fresh mushrooms are around two-thirds less likely to develop breast cancer than those who don't eat mushrooms. The benefits seem to be increased further in those women who drink green tea and the malignancy of the cancers are also reduced. Min and her team believe the benefits stem from the anti-carcinogenic effects of phytochemicals in the fungi and tea.



It's official – mushroom hunting keeps you healthy! Bluebells are nature's reminder to look for St Georges

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P.S. I loathe junk e-mails and would be horrified to think I might be clogging up your systems unnecessarily, so if at any time you want your name taken off, just let me know with a brief - preferably polite - indication that you want to be removed.