

Cooking Corner: Portobellos - welcome sweet springtime

by Caroline Dipping

An easy way to go vegetarian once a week is to incorporate meaty-textured portobello mushrooms into some of your favorite dishes.

Portobello mushrooms are easy to grill and add savory flavor, texture, appetite appeal and nutrients to just about any meal. Photo courtesy of the Mushroom Council. Mushrooms complement almost any everyday meal. They are easy to saute and add savory flavor, texture, appetite appeal and nutrients to just about anything.

Sales of the unglamorous portobello mushroom skyrocketed when a 1980s marketing campaign renamed the mature brown crimini mushrooms "portobello."

When buying portobello mushrooms, select plump firm and solid mushrooms. Avoid the limp or dried looking ones. They should not be shriveled or slippery, which indicates decomposition. The mushroom should have a nice earthy smell.

Mushrooms are the ultimate grilling hero. They can take the heat and absorb marinades and basting sauces like meat, but can also be used so many ways on the grill. Whether mushrooms are the entree, side dish or appetizer, they pair well with other grilled foods.

GRILLING TIPS

Here are some suggestions for grilling mushrooms and vegetables from the Mushroom Council:

Get Ready: Before grilling mushrooms and vegetables, preheat the grill, then spray or brush the grates with vegetable oil to prevent vegetables from sticking. If you are not using a marinade, brush mushrooms lightly with olive oil before placing them on the grill.

Straight on the Grill: Toss portobello caps on the grill for a fast, smoky portobello burger. Or grill thickly sliced portobello mushrooms and use them in favorite dishes like salads, wraps, sandwiches or pasta.

Basted or Marinated: Before tossing mushrooms on the grill, marinate or baste them with a light olive oil, or Italian or balsamic dressings. Marinades complement the natural flavor of mushrooms while keeping them moist.

In a Basket: For smaller or more delicate mushroom varieties, a grilling basket is a good choice. It keeps the mushrooms from slipping through the grate while allowing you to get the grilled flavor.

Sauteed: To sautee mushrooms directly on the grill, use a disposable pan or layer several sheets of aluminum foil and crimp the sides to make a shallow pan. Place on the grill and heat a small amount of olive oil or butter. Add a single layer of mushrooms and cook, without stirring, until mushrooms become red-brown on one side. Flip and cook until other side is the same color.

Skewered: A tried and true grilling favorite. For best results, always put similar mushrooms on the same skewer. If you are using multiple varieties, put each on its own skewer. If you're cooking one variety, group the mushrooms by size. Cooking times for different varieties and sizes will vary, so this is the best way to ensure all your mushrooms are perfectly done.

Get Creative: Grilled mushrooms can be even more delicious when paired with fresh herbs. For flavor inside and out, try using rosemary skewers. Look for long sprigs of rosemary with woody stems and thread button mushrooms on the stems for clever presentation that will impress your family and guests.

FAST FOOD

The following recipes feature portobello mushrooms, either broiled or grilled, and can be prepared in 30 minutes or less. They are prepared faster using store-bought sauces and grated.

BAKED MUSHROOM PARMESAN

4 portobello mushrooms

Olive oil

1/2 cup pasta sauce

4 large basil leaves, thinly sliced

1/4 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes

1 cup shredded mozzarella cheese

1/4 cup grated parmesan cheese

Yields 4 servings.

Brush olive oil on portobellos. Place gill-side-down on baking dish, broil 4 minutes. Flip, broil 4 minutes more.

Remove mushrooms from dish, drain liquid. Reduce oven to 400 F.

Spread pasta sauce on bottom of dish, place mushrooms gill side up. Sprinkle with basil, teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes, mozzarella and parmesan. Bake 5 to 10 minutes.

PORTOBELLO EGGS BENEDICT

Vegetable oil

4 portobello mushrooms

4 slices Canadian bacon

4 eggs, poached

8 tablespoons Hollandaise sauce

Yields 4 servings.

Brush oil on mushrooms. Place gill-side-down on broiler plate and broil 3 minutes. Flip over mushrooms and add 1 slice Canadian bacon to each. Broil 2 minutes.

Remove mushrooms from broiler and place on plates. Pat with paper towel. Top each with 1 poached egg and 2 tablespoons Hollandaise sauce.

GRILLED PHILLY CHEESE-MUSHROOM SANDWICH

4 portobello mushrooms

1 red onion

2 bell peppers

2 tablespoons canola oil

1 tablespoon grilled-steak seasoning (of your choice)

8 slices provolone cheese

4 Italian sandwich rolls

Brush mushrooms, onion and peppers with canola oil and dust with grilled-steak seasoning. Grill on medium, with cover closed, 5 minutes per side.

Remove veggies from grill, thinly slice and combine.

Place 2 slices provolone in each of 4 toasted, split Italian rolls. Top with veggies. Turn off grill, place sandwiches on grill with lid closed 5 minutes or until cheese melts.

Caroline Dipping writes about food for The San Diego Union-Tribune. Contact her at caroline.dipping@uniontrib.com.

Copyright 2009 The San Diego Union-Tribune. Distributed By Creators Syndicate Inc.

Cooking Corner: Portobellos - welcome sweet springtime by Caroline Dipping