

Mushroom Barley Soup

serves 6–8

This soup is rich and substantial. Both the mushrooms and barley lend an earthy flavor. I most appreciate this soup on a cold winter's night.

4 T. butter and/or olive oil
2 cups onions, 1/2" dice
3 cloves garlic, minced
1/3 cup hearty red wine
1/4 cup celery, 1/4" dice
1/4 cup dried porcini or shiitake mushrooms (optional)
1/2 lb. fresh wild mushrooms, thin sliced (optional)
2 T. tamari or soy sauce

2 tsp. salt
1/2 tsp. freshly ground black pepper
1/2 tsp. thyme, dried
1/2 cup barley, rinsed
1 T. additional olive oil
1 1/2 lbs. assorted mushrooms, or 2 lbs. assorted mushrooms if no wild mushrooms were used, thin sliced
2 T. dry sherry
1/2 cup fresh parsley, minced
vegetable stock as needed (see instr.)

Prepare all vegetables as indicated. See instructions for preparing stock. Prepare stock with 12 cups water.

Heat the butter or olive oil in a large soup pot on medium high heat. Add the onions and sauté for 15–20 minutes, stirring frequently. Add the garlic and sauté another 5 minutes, then add the red wine and celery and sauté an additional 2–3 minutes. Soak the dried mushrooms in 2 cups warm water for 5–10 minutes, if you are using them. While they are soaking, add the fresh wild mushrooms to the soup pot, if you are using them, and stir well. Cut up the soaked mushrooms and add them now, along with the soaking liquid. Add the tamari, salt, pepper, and thyme, stir well, and cook for a couple of minutes. Add the rinsed barley and 8 cups strained stock, bring to a boil on high heat, then lower heat to medium and cover the pot.

Meanwhile, heat the additional 1 T. olive oil in a large frying pan on medium high heat. Add the mushrooms, turn the heat to high, and stir frequently. When the mushrooms begin to soften, add 1 T. sherry, stir, then let them cook for 3 minutes without stirring, so that they can dry out and begin to brown. Add the mushrooms to the soup pot, pour the other 1 T. sherry in the frying pan, swirl it around, and pour the juice into the soup pot. This is called deglazing the pan. Cover and simmer on low heat for 45 minutes to 1 hour, until the barley is tender. Add additional stock if the soup seems too thick; it should be hearty but brothy. Taste and adjust seasoning to your liking.

Your kitchen will be filled with wondrous, evolving aromas as this soup cooks. Serve this with rye bread, lots of butter, a fresh green salad with goat cheese, roasted beets and toasted walnuts, and your favorite vegetable. After eating this soup, I feel fortified and energized to tackle my winter chores. Try preparing this soup on a cold winter's day and see if the same happens to you!