



THE WILD CEP MUSHROOM

HARVESTING JULY/OCTOBER FOR THE
NOVEMBER WILD&SLOW



THE JUST-ABOUT COMPLETE, BEGINNERS GUIDE ON
WHERE TO FIND IT, WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE,
HOW TO PICK IT, HOW TO PREPARE IT,
AND HOW TO PRESERVE IT UNTIL NOVEMBER WITH
SUGGESTED RECIPES FOR ANY STALLHOLDER WISHING
TO PARTAKE IN WILD&SLOW



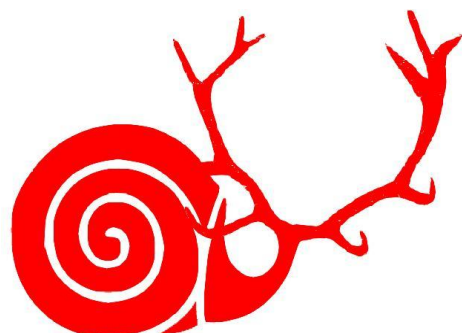
THE WILD CEP

Dubbed the King of wild mushrooms. The Cep is botanically a member of the Boletus family of fungi whose most obvious feature is that in place of the gills as seen on some wild mushrooms there are tubes on the underside of the cap that look sponge-like. The Boletus family of mushrooms are highly identifiable, hence our use in this first Wild Mushroom Template. They are prized in France, where they are called Ceps, Italy where they carry the curious name Porcini - piglets! Here and in the UK, the common name is The Penny Bun on account of the round cap. There are a number of other fungi that belong to the boletus family, but here we concentrate on *Boletus edulis*.



Where to find Wild Ceps

Commonly found in mixed woodlands, all the Boletus Family of mushrooms are mycorrhizal, that is they grow with particular species of Host trees. Fortunately, these trees are very common tree in Ireland, so they are there for the picking right through from late summer until November. Early Ceps are shy and seem to like light-speckled woodlands; Ceps seem to also like the smell of water and streams. Later on in the season, they seem to get bolder and appear in open grassland around their host trees. Host trees are Oak, Beech, Birch and Coniferous



What it looks like

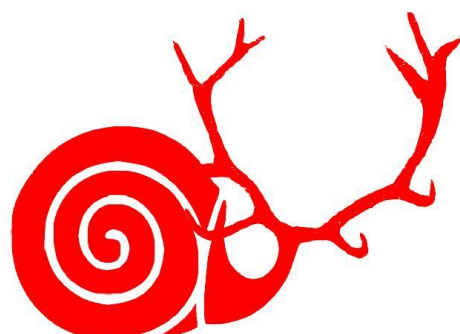


The most obvious feature is the cap, which is brownish in colour and which, in wet weather, sports a slightly, sticky, greasy top. It varies in size from 8-18cm across. The camel or fawn-coloured stem or stalk is thick and bulges in an irregular way - sometimes looking like a pot-belly; sometimes like hips overflowing the waistband; sometimes the bulge is close to the cap and resembles a dowager's hump. Under the cap it has pores, rather than gills, which may vary in colour from creamy, to yellowish, and sometimes 'olivish' pores that look spongy.

The cap is rounded to hemispherical and flattens slightly on maturity. It can have a pale fawn colour or be deeper bread-like colour right down to a burnt bread roll crust appearance.

The stems are usually very swollen to look at with something resembling a whitish network towards the top.

The flesh is firm, meaty and white throughout the whole cut and the mushroom is as weighty as it looks



How to pick

It is a council of perfection to choose a mild, dry day after a rainy period. To prevent squashing and breaking into pieces it is wise to bring a flat-bottomed basket when hunting for mushrooms. Pick by cutting across the base with long slim blade or mushroom knife, leaving the mycorrhizal roots attached to the host tree. Pick those that look as fresh as possible. When you bring them home do check the identity of each one.

How to prepare

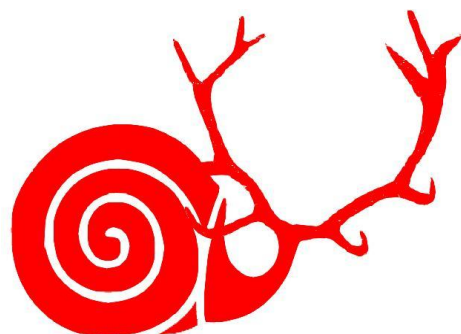
Cut off the earthy base and wipe with a damp clean cloth. Do not peel or you will lose the flavour. They may be eaten cooked and fresh, but for Wild&Slow they should be preserved.

Traditional uses

Mushrooms have long been a traditional breakfast food - either as part of the "full Irish", or on their own cooked in bacon fat. There are Irish recipes for Mushroom Ketchup that go back hundreds of years. Unlike nuts and shellfish, fungi do not normally leave a trace in the archaeological record. However, there is one known find of some mature puffball fungi found preserved in the midden (kitchen trash dump) of a Neolithic site in Scotland. So it's likely our ancient ancestors were gathering and eating fungi since Neolithic times.

Renowned food historian Dorothy Hartley records that "small button mushrooms are best for pickling and cooking in milk, rounder pink-gilled ones can be cooked and preserved in a variety of ways, fully opened reddish-gilled flats are best grilled with butter; when they becomes darker underneath but still dry, they are good for drying and flavouring, and when gone quite black are only good for ketchup". ⁽¹⁾

Irish food culture records that if there were more than a few for breakfast or supper we grilled, fried, or baked them, plain or stuffed, used them in soups, sauces, stews, in tarts and pies, salads, and condiments, and preserved them for winter use in much the same ways as today except for (perhaps) in oil.



Preserving Wild Ceps

Drying mushrooms is the most common and easiest method. They may also be preserved in oil, pickled, or made into a ketchup or relish.

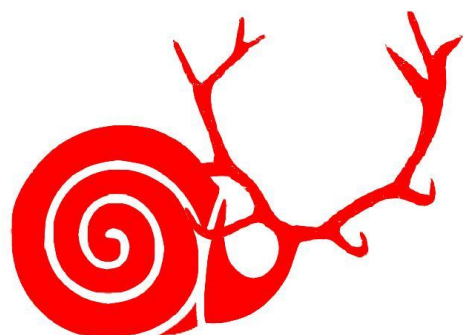
Preserving Wild Ceps by Drying

Cut off the base and wipe with a clean, damp cloth. If the mushrooms are large they should be cut into slices. Thread onto a thin twig or use a darning needle and very thin string or very thick button thread; a knot between each piece keeps them separated and allows them to dry faster. Hang the twig or thread in a dry, warm place - from rafters, if you possess them, or in an airing cupboard. You could also dry them in the warming drawer of a cast-iron cooker or in a very, very cool oven (below 60°C). Once they are fully dry they may be stored in jars or paper bags; storage must be in a dry, dark place.

Preserving Wild Ceps by Ketchup

This traditional Irish Mushroom Ketchup, unlike thick gloopy tomato ketchup, is a thin, intensely flavoured, lightly spiced condiment. It can be used to add zest to a huge variety of soups, stews, and sauces, or simply when it takes your fancy. Collected by Florence Irwin, the “cookin’ woman” who taught cooking skills in rural Co. Down in Northern Ireland. Her real passion was collecting and trying out the traditional recipes and ways within rural areas. She wrote regular articles about her discoveries in The Northern Whig and later they were collected into two books. ⁽²⁾

Choose a cool place (the dairy was traditional). As the ‘mushroom season progressed, mushrooms were placed in an earthenware jar as they were gathered and each layer covered in salt’. Each time you gather some more add another layer and sprinkle salt on top and press well down. Continue until you have a thick black liquid. Pour this liquid into small ‘sterilised’ bottles with tightly fitting caps or corks. Other flavourings of your choice may be added at this stage. The most usual in Irish food culture was pepper and onion.





Preserving Wild Ceps by Relishing

Cut mushrooms into small pieces. Sprinkle well with salt. Spread out on a large dish. Cover and allow standing for 48 hours. Give them a stir occasionally. Place mushrooms and the liquid they have exuded into a pot with 200mls white wine or cider vinegar. Add a few cloves of garlic and a couple of large onions, finely chopped. Add a tablespoon of spices of your choice: peppercorns, nutmeg, cinnamon, allspice, or ginger. Simmer gently for about two hours. Strain through muslin and bottle in small 'sterilised' jars - small, because once opened this relish should be stored in the fridge and used up reasonably quickly.

Preserving Wild Ceps in Oil

For 1kg of Wild ceps, take the juice of two lemons, 3-4 cloves garlic, a few bay leaves, peppercorns, 100mls wine vinegar and 60mls rapeseed or olive oil and water, and simmer boil for fifteen minutes. Slice the Wild Ceps and place in the pot add more water if needed to bring liquid level with the mushrooms. Simmer for five minutes and allow cooling in the liquid. Drain. Place in sterilised jars and cover with oil and a well-fitting cap. Add additional spices or herbs as you wish. Store in a cool, dry place.

Preserving Wild Ceps by Pickling

Although traditional Irish recipes would have been made with malt vinegar, it's pretty harsh for modern tastes. Wine or cider vinegar might be better choices. If making a sweet/sour pickle that includes sugar you will find you'll need a little extra sugar if using cider vinegar. With pickles the amount of spices, herbs and other flavourings are very much a matter for individual taste. So, do not feel the need to follow a recipe slavishly. If you like hot pickles feel free to use chilli, but bear in mind that you don't want to overwhelm the flavour of the mushroom! If you are that fond of chilli make a chilli pickle!

Place prepared Ceps in a pot of salted water. Bring to the boil, remove from the heat and allow the pot to stand for five minutes. Drain and spread out and allow water to dry off. Place in sterilised jars. Meanwhile, using a litre of wine vinegar, add peppercorns, garlic cloves lightly bruised, pickling onions, and sprigs of fresh herbs of your choice. Simmer gently for fifteen minutes. Allow to cool, pour over the mushrooms in the jars, making sure the mushrooms are fully covered. It takes several weeks for the flavour to develop.

⁽¹⁾ Food in England by Dorothy Hartley, published 1954. Republished 1996 by Little Brown, UK.

⁽²⁾ The Cookin' Woman by Florence Irwin, published 1937, 1949, 1986 by Blackstaff Press



Powdered Wild Ceps

This recipe is adapted from Jane Grigson's book *Mushroom Feast*. In the book she credits it to a pamphlet called *Pottery* published anonymously. It was, she later discovered, by the London Wine and Food Society, the recipe had been devised in 1946. Just the thing to add flavour and spice during post war rationing! It's a clever way of adding flavour to wild mushrooms - to be dried and powdered and added to soups and stews.

So you need sliced wild mushrooms to fill a 2.5 Lt. Bowl, together with 1 onion sliced, 5 cloves, 15g powdered mace and 1 tsp white pepper

Spread the mushrooms and all the other ingredients in a wide pan. Cook very gently until the juices run and then increase the heat until the juices are re-absorbed. Take great care not to let the mushrooms and onion burn. Spread the mushrooms on baking trays and dry in a cool oven (about 90-100°C) When completely dry, crush in a mortar and pestle until you have a fine powder.

Note: You might like to dry them more slowly and a heat below 60°C to prevent any chance of the mushrooms burning. Feel free to experiment with the spiced.

Use in soups, stews, sauces, tarts, or whatever takes your fancy as a condiment.



LONE PENNYBUN, MACREDDIN VILLAGE WOODS, LATE JULY 2011



Possible recipes that might be suitable for a stallholder at Wild&Slow

A Wild Cep and Chicken Liver Paté

250g Chicken Livers

120g. Butter

20g dried **Wild Ceps** or 60g **Wild Ceps** preserved in oil

1 medium onion, very finely chopped

1 clove of garlic, peeled, crushed and finely chopped; or 1 tsp chopped (3-4 leaves if whole) wild garlic leaves preserved in oil

Clarified butter

If using dried mushrooms, reconstitute them in a small amount of hot water until soft; drain and reserve the mushroom juice. Trim the livers by removing the white gristly core. Melt 90g of butter in a pan and gently cook the livers for 3-4 minutes, turning once. They should be pink in the middle. Lift livers from the pan and set aside.

Cook the fresh chopped garlic and onion until it just begins to soften. Add the chopped Wild Ceps and cook for a few minutes. Pour on the reserved juice and simmer until the juice is re-absorbed. Melt the remaining butter in the pan (adding if you wish a splash of brandy or Madeira). Scrape up all the gorgeous bits and pieces of onion, garlic and mushrooms from the pan. Add the contents of the pan to the cooked livers. For a paté with a rough texture, pass through a food mill and season to taste. For a smooth texture, whiz in a food processor or blender. Turn into small glass jars or pots, smoothing the surface carefully. Pour the clarified butter on top using enough to form a good seal of butter. Allow cooling until set. Cover with lids or tinfoil and store in the fridge. All paté tastes better after a few days storage.



A Wild Ceps Soup

This happens to be a favourite of one member of the Sugar Loaf Convivium. It exists in a copybook of handwritten recipes collected in childhood. Then it was made on a day when a mushroom hunt on a nearby links golf course had yielded more than was needed for breakfast. A later more grown-up hand suggests adding a clove of chopped garlic and small handful of parsley and black pepper.

130 g dried **Wild Ceps**

4 tablespoons butter

1 thick slice two day or three day old batch loaf

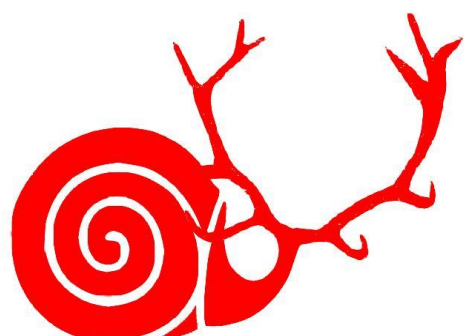
1 lt. stock (any stock except that from corned beef or ham)

1 small carton (100ml) cream

About ten twists of a nutmeg grinder

Salt and Pepper

Soak the bread in a little of the stock. Wipe and chop the mushrooms into small pieces. Cook them in the butter over a low heat. When the juices run add all the seasonings, the bread and the stock, and stir them around so that the breadcrumbs thicken the soup. In about 10-15 minutes it will be done. Add the cream and allow it to heat through. You may push it through a food mill or even whiz in a processor if you wish. Eat hot or cold.

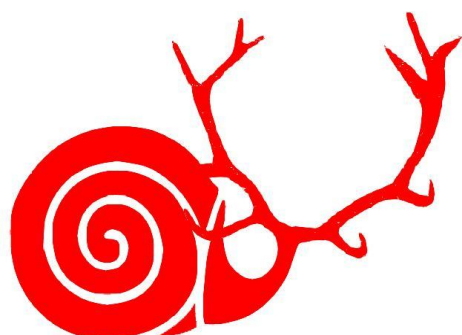


A Wild Cep Tart

One 20cm shortcrust or rich short crust pastry case, baked blind
60g dried **Wild Ceps**, or 175g preserved in oil (drained)
1 very small onion, very finely chopped
3 eggs
250ml cream
125g Irish Gouda-style cheese, grated
1 tbsp butter, or the drained oil from the mushrooms
Salt, freshly ground pepper and nutmeg, to taste

Reconstitute dried mushrooms in a little hot water and reserve the juices. Heat the butter (or drained oil) in a pan and gently cook the chopped onion until soft. Add the sliced or chopped mushrooms and cook gently for about 2 minutes. Add the reserved juice and cook until it is re-absorbed. Season with salt, freshly ground pepper and nutmeg (or spicing of your choice) and spread on the pastry case. Mix the eggs and cream and add the grated cheese. Pour the mixture over the mushrooms and bake at 220°C for 30-35 minutes until the filling is just barely set.

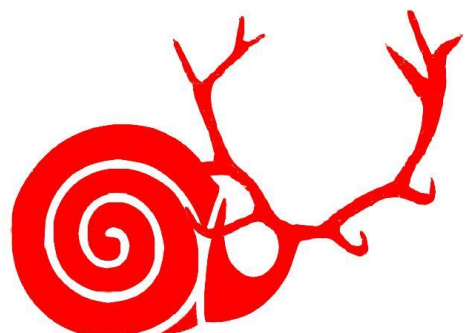
Note: a sprinkling of chopped wild hazelnuts may be added to the filling if desired.



Wild Cep Burgers

100g dried **Wild Ceps**, reconstituted and finely chopped
1 tbsp rapeseed oil
1 onion, finely chopped
2 garlic cloves, minced
Pinch ground cumin
1 drained can of back beans
50 g soft goat cheese, crumbled
4 slices bread, processed into bread crumbs
Salt and black pepper

Heat the oil in a large pan over medium-high heat. Add the onion and cook, stirring, until golden. Add the mushrooms, garlic, and cumin and cook, stirring, until the mushrooms have released their juices, about 5 minutes. Spoon the mixture into the food processor. Add the beans and process briefly until well combined but still chunky. Stir in the goat cheese and breadcrumbs. Season. Form into patties



The Nitty-Gritty

Okay...so here's the nitty-gritty, but don't let it put you off! All twelve or so of these 'Wild Food Templates' for gathering and harvesting Wild Foods have been chosen because they are highly identifiable. It is always desirable for the first time forager to go out with someone who has experience.

However, as always, it is up to you to discern what to pick, how to harvest it and preserve it in a manner that would be in keeping with and fit for our ancestors.

Remember, if in doubt.... don't!

Disclaimer

For countless generations our forefathers/mothers gathered Wild Foods and it seems they did so pretty well...after all we're all still here! However modern protocol demands that we produce a disclaimer like this. So here we go.

The above plant images, although helpful, are not for identifying purposes. It is important to use a good guide, unless you are familiar with these plants. This post is only an introduction to the plants mentioned therein, and should not be relied upon in isolation. Foraging guides of reput should always be used, and one should always err on the conservative side, remembering, that it is important to read any guide together with any caution notes, and ultimately responsibility for your safety and those that you give, serve or sell these foods to, lies with you.

All information contained including various recipes are purely for illustrative and informative purposes only and ultimately it is the user that determines as to how the above mentioned Wild Food, might be used.

