



Wild Rice and Mushroom Soup

From *America's Test Kitchen* Season 14: Let's Start with Soup

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS:

We kept the focus on the wild rice and mushrooms by selecting ingredients that amplified the nutty, earthy, *umami*-rich flavor profile we were after. Simmering the wild rice with baking soda decreased the cook time and brought out more robust flavor. We used the excess simmering liquid as a bouillon, infusing the entire soup with wild rice flavor. Fresh cremini mushrooms and ground dried shiitakes provided a winning combination of meaty texture and flavor. A final addition of cornstarch helped suspend the dense rice and gave our soup a velvety texture.

Serves 6 to 8

White mushrooms can be substituted for the cremini mushrooms. We use a spice grinder to process the dried shiitake mushrooms, but a blender also works.

INGREDIENTS

1/4 ounce dried shiitake mushrooms, rinsed

4 1/4 cups water

1 sprig fresh thyme

1 bay leaf

1 garlic clove, peeled, plus 4 cloves, minced

Salt and pepper

1/4 teaspoons baking soda

1 cup wild rice

4 tablespoons unsalted butter

1 pound cremini mushrooms, trimmed and sliced 1/4 inch thick

1 onion, chopped fine

1 teaspoon tomato paste

2/3 cup dry sherry

4 cups low-sodium chicken broth

1 tablespoon soy sauce

1/4 cup cornstarch

1/2 cup heavy cream

1/4 cup minced fresh chives

1/4 teaspoon finely grated lemon zest

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 375 degrees. Grind shiitake mushrooms in spice grinder until finely ground (you should have about 3 tablespoons).
2. Bring 4 cups water, thyme, bay leaf, garlic clove, $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon salt, and baking soda to boil in medium saucepan over high heat. Add rice and return to boil. Cover saucepan, transfer to oven, and bake until rice is tender, 35 to 50 minutes. Strain rice through fine-mesh strainer set in 4-cup liquid measuring cup; discard thyme, bay leaf, and garlic. Add enough water to reserved cooking liquid to measure 3 cups.
3. Melt butter in Dutch oven over high heat. Add cremini mushrooms, onion, minced garlic, tomato paste, $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon salt, and 1 teaspoon pepper. Cook, stirring occasionally, until vegetables are browned and dark fond develops on bottom of pot, 15 minutes. Add sherry, scraping up any browned bits, and cook until reduced and pot is almost dry, about 2 minutes. Add ground shiitake mushrooms, reserved rice cooking liquid, broth, and soy sauce and bring to boil. Reduce heat to low and simmer, covered, until onion and mushrooms are tender, about 20 minutes.
4. Whisk cornstarch and remaining $\frac{1}{4}$ cup water in small bowl. Stir cornstarch slurry into soup, return to simmer, and cook until thickened, about 2 minutes. Remove pot from heat and stir in cooked rice, cream, chives, and lemon zest. Cover and let stand for 20 minutes. Season with salt and pepper to taste, and serve.

TECHNIQUE

MAKING WILD RICE ACT LIKE STEAK

We brown meat, baked goods, and many other foods as a matter of course, since the deeper color is an indication of the Maillard reaction, the process triggered by heat that causes a food's proteins and sugars to recombine into hundreds of new flavor compounds that boost complexity. To achieve richer browned flavor in ordinary rice, we often toast the raw grains in the pan before adding liquid. But toasting doesn't work as well with wild rice, since it is technically a grass with a hard pectin-rich coating that must break down before the proteins and sugars on the inside can brown. However, we stumbled upon another way to achieve browning: adding baking soda to the cooking water. Baking soda not only breaks down the pectin seed coat to speed cooking (our original goal) but also lowers the temperature necessary for browning to occur—from at least 300 degrees to below water's boiling point of 212. Another factor in our favor: Wild rice is high in the amino acids lysine and glycine, proteins that are particularly sensitive to browning. Baking soda added to the pot led to nuttier-tasting wild rice and a savory, deep-brown stock that enriched the soup.

RICH COLOR, RICH FLAVOR

This stock boasts some of the same "browned" flavors as seared meat.

