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Wild Mushroom Soup with Sherry and Thyme

We made this soup one year for our Thanksgiving take-out menu at the Market. Our customers loved it so much we now serve it at the store all through the fall. If you don't mind the extra step, make a quick broth from the mushroom trimmings (I give the recipe below) to intensify the mushroom flavor of the soup.

Serves 8 to 10 (Makes about 2-1/2 quarts)

2-1/2 pounds assorted wild mushrooms such as chanterelle, oyster, Portobello, cremini, shiitake, or dried porcini
4 tablespoons unsalted butter
4 tablespoons olive oil
1 large yellow onion, diced, trimmings reserved
4 shallots, minced, trimmings reserved
2 celery stalks, diced, trimming reserved
1 tart apple (such as Granny Smith or Pippin), peeled, cored, and diced
2 garlic cloves, minced
1 cup dry sherry
Leaves from 3 fresh thyme sprigs (about 1 tablespoon)
6 cups Mushroom Broth (recipe follows), or chicken or vegetable broth
2 teaspoons sea salt, plus more to taste
2 tablespoons chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley leaves

1. Wipe the mushrooms clean with a damp cloth or paper towel. Cut the tough stems off the mushrooms and coarsely chop. (Reserve the stems to make the Mushroom Broth). If you are using dried mushrooms, soak them in warm water for 30 minutes, rinse, and roughly chop.

2. Melt 2 tablespoons of the butter and 2 tablespoons of the olive oil together in a large saucepan over medium heat. Add the onion and shallots, reduce the heat to low, and cook about 10 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the onion is soft and translucent. Add the celery and apple and cook about 5 minutes longer. Add the remaining 2 tablespoons butter, 2 tablespoons oil, and the mushrooms to the pan. Increase the heat to high and cook until the mushrooms are golden brown and have reduced in size, 10 to 15 minutes. Add the garlic and cook and stir for 1 minute longer, being careful not to brown the garlic.

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3. Stir in the sherry and cook to reduce for about 1 minute. Add the thyme, broth, salt, and pepper and bring it to a low boil. Reduce the heat and simmer the mushrooms for about 30 minutes so the flavors can meld. Cool slightly.

4. Ladle out 2 cups of the soup and place it in the bowl of a food processor or the jar of a blender fitted with a metal blade. Puree until smooth and add the pureed soup back to the pot with the chunky soup or use an immersion blender to puree the soup directly in the pot, making sure to leave it slightly chunky. Stir in the parsley and serve warm.

The Mushroom Broth

The discarded stems of mushrooms make a rich, flavorful broth that will enhance the mushroom flavor of Wild Mushroom Soup or the Wild Mushroom and Spinach Risotto (page 202). Place the cleaned mushroom stems in a large saucepan with the vegetable trimmings from the soup, 3 bay leaves, 1 halved large onion, 1 roughly chopped carrot, roughly chopped celery stalk, 1 tablespoon salt, and 1 teaspoon freshly ground pepper. Cover with 2 to 3 quarts of water and bring to a low boil over high heat. Reduce the heat and simmer for 45 minutes to 1 hour. Strain the broth through a strainer or colander. In an airtight container this broth will keep, refrigerated, for up to 3 days or in the freezer for up to 3 months.