

## SHIITAKES

I had voted in two elections before I ever had the good sense to eat a non-hallucinogenic mushroom. Pity me; mushrooms and their cousins, truffles are the source of some of the most mind bending flavors I have encountered. And lucky for all of us, we have good access to several different kinds of these tasty fungi at most grocery stores and farmers markets. And the DIY culture of today has made home mushroom cultivation possible in our backyards.

Mushrooms lend a singular, umami rich flavor to the dishes they are used in. Since we have access to our own shiitakes, I am using them for this recipe. But any wild type—oyster, chanterelle, hedgehog or woodear will be just as good. Use what you like. I would be stingy not to recommend the book from which I got this recipe. Edna Lewis and Scott Peacock's "The Gift of Southern Cooking" is in my Top Ten!

**COOKING**  
À LA *Lala*



## SHIITAKES ON TOAST À LA LALA

**1 lb. shiitake mushrooms** *or any other wild variety you like*

**Several slices of bread,** *baguette or ciabatta or the like*

**Butter**

**4 oz. of St. Andre,** *or any other triple cream cheese*

**3 T. unsalted butter**

**1/2 c. minced shallot or onion**

**1-2 T. minced garlic**

**3 T. minced chives**

**Salt and pepper to taste**

**Lemon juice**

Clean the mushrooms, I like to use a dry pastry brush. Don't wash your mushrooms or submerge them in water. Chop them up, fine or rough, to the texture you like.

Before you saute the mushrooms, butter your bread slices and toast them until they are golden and crisp.

Now, add the 3 T. Butter to a saute pan over medium high heat. When the butter has melted, toss in the chopped mushrooms and toss to coat. Add a good bump of salt and cook until the mushrooms have softened and gotten some color. Add the shallot or onion and garlic and cook for a few minutes, taking care not to let the garlic burn. Sprinkle some lemon juice over the mixture and taste. Adjust seasoning to taste.

Finally, schmear some of the cheese onto the toasted bread and top with the mushroom mixture and fresh chives. Serve pronto!

## PESTO

Pesto, as most of us know it, is a paste or sauce made with basil, garlic, pine nuts, parmesan cheese and olive oil; this is Pesto Genovese. However, you can use any number of ingredients to make pesto: artichokes, sun-dried tomatoes or peppers. Since I have an abundance of arugula in our garden, and our basil hasn't yet taken off, I'm making a lot of arugula pesto. It's peppery, nutty and bright all at once and can be used on crostini, on pasta or made into a vinaigrette if you like.

You will find arugula pesto appealingly flexible; you can take him anywhere!

**COOKING**  
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## ARUGULA PESTO À LA LALA

**4 oz. of fresh arugula, heavy stems removed**  
**1-3 cloves of garlic, roughly chopped**  
**2-3 T. toasted pine nuts or walnuts**

**1/2 c. or more EVOO**  
**Salt and pepper**  
**1/2 c. grated parmesan cheese**

Put the first 3 ingredients into the bowl of a food processor or blender and pulse about 10 times until every thing is roughly chopped. With the motor running, slowly drizzle in the olive oil, scraping down sides as needed.

When you reach a texture that you like, put the mixture into another bowl and blend in the cheese and salt and pepper to your liking. You may want more cheese, if you do, go for it.

Your pesto is ready for your crostini, pasta or whatever delivery system you choose!

## RISOTTO

This is comfort food with a very sexy accent. I adore risotto; it's creamy and rich and is a great delivery system for all sorts of goodies: saffron, seafood, peas and asparagus. One of my favorites is mushroom risotto. I am still making up for all of the years I turned my nose up at fungi. And now that we are growing our own shiitakes I have no excuses not to make this umami-packed dish.

To make risotto, you need Arborio rice. It is a short grain rice that releases much more starch when cooked and stirred than long grain varieties like Jasmine or Basmati. It is this starch that makes risotto so creamy. I am a nut for chicken stock, so that's what I use, but feel free to use vegetable or mushroom stock to make yours. Be ready to finish with grated Parmesan or Pecorino and if you are feeling really decadent, a bit of butter. And please, don't forget your chives!

**COOKING**  
À LA *Lala*



# MUSHROOM RISOTTO À LA LALA

**6-8 c. chicken stock or vegetable broth,**  
*at a simmer*  
**2-3 T. butter, EVOO or schmaltz**  
**1/2 c. minced shallot or onion**  
**1 lb. mushrooms, cleaned and chopped**  
**1/2 c. white wine**

**2 t. fresh thyme**  
**1 c. Arborio rice**  
**Salt and pepper**  
**Butter (optional)**  
**Minced chives to finish**

Heat the fat in a heavy bottom pot over medium high heat. When the fat is shimmering, add the shallots/onions and saute until softened, about 4 minutes. Now add the mushrooms and toss to coat with the fat and add a 1/2 t. of salt to sweat the mushrooms.

After the mushrooms have softened and released some of their liquid, add the rice and stir for a minute or two until coated with the fat in the pot. Next, add the wine and stir until it is absorbed and the mixture is dry. Now, start adding the warm liquid in 1/2 c. increments until the risotto is cooked the way you like it. Give it a taste after you have added about 4 cups of liquid. You may end up adding another 2-3 cups. Now you can add the thyme.

When you get the risotto to the texture you like, add the grated cheese and stir to combine. Taste again and adjust seasoning to your liking. Finish with 1-2 T. of butter if you like, but the chives are not optional! Buon Appetito!