



Mushrooms are really not a vegetable, but a fungus. Fungus is a plant that does not have roots or leaves, does not flower or bear seeds, doesn't make its own food, and doesn't need light to grow. Mushrooms grow best in dark, damp places.

Mushrooms come in many shapes, sizes, and colors. The umbrella-shape at the top of the mushroom is called the cap and can be the most colorful part. The underneath side of the cap contains spores and gills. The stem of the mushroom is called the stalk. The base of the mushroom is called the hyphae.

## Facts

In ancient times, mushrooms were thought to be magical. People were forbidden to eat them unless they were warriors or kings.

When mushrooms grow in a circle, they are called fairy rings because people in the olden days thought they were made by fairies dancing in the night.

Since mushrooms are grown from microscopic spores, mushroom farming is a step-by-step process that involves: two phases of composting; spawning (mushroom farmers collecting the spores); casing (a soil mixture that acts as a water reservoir that is placed on top of the mushroom spores); pinning (the growth stage where the shape of the mushroom forms); and harvesting.

## History

Archaeological evidence indicates that humans have been eating mushrooms for thousands of years. The first cultivators of mushrooms appear to have been the Greeks and Romans. Ancient Egyptians considered mushrooms to be food for the royals. The French adored the fungus and began harvesting them in caves during the seventeenth century. These famous fungi didn't reach popularity in the United States until the late 1800s.

## Where Grown

Mushrooms are found all over the world and have been a very honored food in many cultures.

About half of the mushrooms harvested in the United States come from the Kennett Square area of Pennsylvania. Kennett Square has been named the "mushroom capital" of the world.

## Types

Sources:

5 A Day, Fruit and Vegetable of the Month: <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/5ADay/month/index.htm>  
<http://www.americanmushroom.org/>

Encyclopedia of Foods: A Guide to Healthy Nutrition. Dole Food Company: 2002.



There are over 38,000 mushroom varieties today. Some are edible and some are highly toxic. Here's a small sample of the most popular edible mushrooms you'll see in the market:

**Agaricus (White or Button)** - These mushrooms are the most common variety prepackaged in supermarkets; available fresh, canned, or frozen. White mushrooms are mildly flavored, are tasty when eaten raw but even more flavorful when cooked.

**Chanterelles, or Girolle** - These trumpet shaped fungi are highly regarded mushrooms favored for their gold to yellow color, and rich flavor, ranging from apricot to earthier tasting. Chanterelles are best eaten fresh, although they are also available dried or canned.

**Crimini, or Italian Brown** - These mushrooms are similar to the button variety, yet they are darker in color, have a richer flavor, and have a more dense texture. Criminis were once an imported mushroom but are now grown domestically.

**Enoki, or Enokitake** - This fungi takes on a sproutlike appearance with small caps and thin, long, stems. Native to Japan, white in color, with a light fruity taste, these mushrooms are excellent when served raw in soups and salads.

**Morel** - These mushrooms are highly priced and highly prized for their intense earthy flavor. They are usually found in the wild, although can now be grown commercially. This conical shaped, honey combed surface fungi is small, with dark brown hues, is suitable for stuffing and is ideal for sauces and stews.

**Oyster or Pleurotus** - These mushrooms grow in clusters, and range in color from off-white to shades of brown. Subtly tasting like an oyster, its chewy texture is more suited to cooked dishes.

**Porcini** - Porcini mushrooms are well valued for their meaty texture, interesting flavor, and distinguishing shape. These mushrooms vary in size and are domestically grown or imported from Europe depending on the season. This variety is usually expensive, but is considered one of the finest-tasting mushrooms.

**Portobello** - These are large cremini-like mushrooms that are sometimes the size of a regular hamburger! These fungi are circular, flat, and long, with a dense, chewy texture. Portobellos are excellent for grilling or roasting.

**Shiitake** - Shiitake mushrooms were originally cultivated on natural oak logs and only grown in Japan, but are now available domestically. These mushrooms are large, black-brown, and have an earthy rich flavor. This fungi is enjoyed in stir-fry, soups, or even a meat substitute. Dried Shiitakes have more intense flavors and are sometimes preferable to fresh.

## Nutrients

- Cooked mushrooms are an excellent source of niacin and a good source of riboflavin

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