

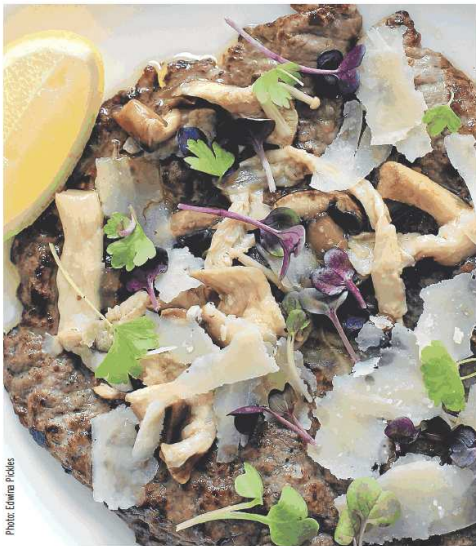
 Seasonal cook


Photo: Estelina Pickles

The fun in fungi

STEVE MANFREDI laments that when it comes to mushrooms we're still largely in the dark.

So little is known about Australia's native mushrooms. Why does this matter? They're a resource that is virtually untapped. I keep thinking of all the great-tasting mushrooms out there growing, maturing and then rotting in the bush.

Australia is estimated to have about 2500 mushroom species, including about 5000 mushrooms, of which roughly 5 per cent have been described.

Traditional Aboriginal knowledge and use of fungi was extensive, but little of that knowledge remains.

"There are only a few fungi in Australia which have been well documented as being considered edible by Aborigines," writes Arpad

C. Kalotas in *Fungi of Australia*. "They range from the glutinous Beech Orange of eastern Australia to the unidentified Mulga Bolete of central Australia."

This knowledge of the edible implies knowledge of the poisonous and inedible fungi. Kalotas cites a note by John White, surgeon-general to the First Fleet, who observed the behaviour of Aborigines: "As they conducted us to the water, a toadstool was picked up by one of our company, which some of the natives perceiving, they made signs for us to throw it away, as no being good to eat."

Still, somewhere there must be Oz or porcini. smanfedi@smh.com.au
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MINUTE STEAK WITH PRESERVED MUSHROOMS

3 litres water
 750ml white wine vinegar
 2 cloves garlic, lightly crushed
 10 sprigs thyme
 4 red chillies, halved lengthways
 Peel from 1 lemon, cut into large strips
 750g mixed mushrooms (button, swiss brown, oyster, shimeji and king brown) cut into bite-size pieces
 1 cup extra virgin olive oil
 Salt and pepper
 600g trimmed beef fillet, cut into four even pieces
 1/2 cup shaved parmesan
 1/2 cup mixed herb leaves
 4 lemon wedges

Place water and vinegar in a large pot with garlic, thyme, chilli and lemon peel. Bring to boil then reduce heat to a simmer. Simmer for 15 minutes. Raise heat and add mushrooms. Once it returns to the boil, leave for 5 minutes then remove from heat and pour contents into a large container to cool down. Once cool, strain and place mushrooms in a suitable container, with lid. Add olive oil to mushrooms, season with salt and pepper and mix well. Can keep in refrigerator until needed for 8-10 days. Prepare beef by placing one piece at a time between two sheets of Go-Between (or baking paper). Using a flat-sided meat tenderiser, flatten until it is about 1cm thick. Barbecue or grill each piece on high heat for 30 seconds each side. Place on 4 serving plates, scatter mushrooms at room temperature on top, followed by parmesan and mixed herb leaves. Serve with lemon wedges.

Serves 4 as a main course (pictured)
 Wine Primitivo or zinfandel

MUSHROOMS FRIED IN CHICKPEA BATTER

750g mixed mushrooms
 100g chickpea flour
 50g plain flour
 1 egg, beaten
 50ml milk
 50ml sparkling mineral water, cold
 Pinch nutmeg
 Salt and pepper
 2 cups extra virgin olive oil (or other frying oil)

Cut mushrooms into bite-sized pieces. Sieve flours into a bowl. Make a well in the middle and add egg, milk, mineral water, nutmeg and a pinch of salt and pepper. Mix well. It should be a little runny but not watery. You may need to add more water. Place oil into a frying pot that provides an oil depth of 4-5cm. Using a thermometer clipped to the side of the pot, bring the oil to 170°C. Dip mushrooms into batter and fry for 1-2 minutes. Fry each type of mushroom separately and in small batches so they're not crowded in fryer. Drain on absorbent paper. Season lightly with salt.

Serves 4-6 as a snack
 Wine Prosecco or champagne

 Full bottle

QUAFFING

LA LINEA TEMPRANILLO 2010, \$27

Wine-maker Peter Leske sources tempranillo from several vineyards in the Adelaide Hills. The result here is a superbly balanced red. While there's more fruit presence and brightness compared with much Spanish tempranillo, this looks so good, with peppercy liquorice, plenty of sweetish plum fruit plus a tangey edge – almost like Redskins for adults. With its ripe, smooth tannins, this is a fantastic example of how brilliantly the variety can grow here.



TRYING

DAL ZOTTO 'IMMIGRANTE' PROSECCO 2010, \$30

King Valley-based Dal Zotto was first to plant prosecco in Australia – great foresight given how popular the wine style is now. And while it also produces a cheery non-vintage aged Pucino, the 2010 Immigrante is more finely tuned and precise. As expected, it's super-fresh and bright, with plenty of fizz on entry. It buds with some creaminess, mid-palate and an intriguing complex iodine note, zesty citrus and crunchy apples flavours. Finishes dry and clean. Lovely stuff that makes the perfect aperitif.



CELLARING

HODDLES CREEK TIER YARRA VALLEY 2010 CHARDONNAY, \$40

ler is Hoddles Creek's top label. While wine-maker Franco d'Anna produces stunning pinot noir and pinot blanc, his chardonnay is on another level. It's finely tuned, with stone fruit and citrus nuances, but it's more savoury in profile. Expect a creamy, leesy texture and zingy natural acidity. It has a mineral sensibility as it dances across the palate to and a super-long, persistent finish. A wonderful wine to keep for the next seven years.

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