

Simmered Shiitake Mushrooms (Shiitake no nikata)

Inspired by Hiroko Shimbo, The Sushi Experience (ISBN 1-4000-4208-9)

When you purchase dried shiitake mushrooms, choose ones with thick, meaty, and plump caps that are not spread open. On the surface of these plump caps, you will see a cracked pattern resembling the shell of a turtle. Bring a piece close to your nose: it should smell sweet and aromatic. This is the donko mushroom (the Mercedes of shiitake mushrooms), and the price is twice that of lesser varieties – those with thin, flat, opened caps and thin stems – but the flavor is at least four times better. I highly recommend this extravagance.



The prepared mushrooms will keep their taste and quality for three to four days in the refrigerator. Simmered mushrooms are used over and over in Japanese cuisine. So, prepare a batch and freeze them, or cook half the portion. The mushrooms are used whole, sliced, or chopped

1. Soak mushrooms

1/8 pound (57 grams, 2 ounces)
dried shiitake mushrooms
(about 14), preferably donko
variety

Rinse the shiitake mushrooms under cold running tap water.

Soak them in a large bowl of cold water overnight.

1 1/2 quarts cold water

2. Braise mushrooms

mushrooms, soaked
soaking liquid

The next day, remove the mushrooms from the water, reserving the soaking liquid.

Put the mushrooms in a medium pot with enough of the reserved soaking liquid to barely cover them.

Set the pot over medium heat.

Bring to a boil.

Turn the heat to medium-low.

Cover mushrooms with a drop lid or a parchment paper disk.

Cook for 30 minutes.

Skim off foam that rises during cooking.

3. Add sugar

1/4 cup sugar

Add the sugar.

Cover.

Cook for 10 minutes.

4. Add soy sauce

1 ½ tablespoons shoyu (soy sauce)

Add soy sauce.

Cover.

Cook for 10 minutes, or until about 85 percent of the liquid is absorbed.

5. Add soy sauce and mirin

1 ½ tablespoons shoyu (soy sauce)

Add the remaining soy sauce and the sweet cooking wine.

1 ½ tablespoons mirin (sweet cooking wine)

Turn the heat to medium-high.

Cook the mushrooms, stirring with a wooden spoon, until the liquid is almost absorbed and the mushrooms are coated with a layer of glossy, syrupy sauce.

6. Drain and cool

Drain the mushrooms in a strainer.

Turn them over several times to cool them quickly, discarding the cooking liquid.

7. Store

Store the cooled mushrooms in the refrigerator or freezer.

8. Use

Before using, cut off the stems. The cook can enjoy them as a snack.