

Miso Soup with Matsutake Mushrooms and Seaweed



Tricholoma (magnivelare) murrillianum, or Matsutake, the common name for a highly sought mushroom that grows in Asia, Europe, and North America. It is prized in Japanese, Korean, and Chinese cuisine for its distinct odor. To this day they are given as important gifts meant to symbolize fertility and happiness.

They are a sensory adventure often referred to as ‘spicy’, ‘intense’, or ‘like cinnamon.’ Some would prefer the term ‘smelly gym socks.’ I personally did not appreciate the odor of Matsutake mushrooms until I began to use them in Asian cooking, where the seasonings were more compatible with this fragrant mushroom.

Bonito flakes and kombu are found in most Asian grocery stores as well as the Shiro miso paste. You may be able to find Matsutake mushrooms there at a good price. Instant dashi stock is available, but this is so easy to make, I usually make a double batch. First make the Dashi soup stock from bonito flakes and seaweed then combine with the Miso soup. You can also

use this recipe as the base for a vegetarian matzo ball soup or add cut up chicken to it. There are just so many variations you can try.

Dashi:

4 cups water

1-ounce bull kelp seaweed (kombu)

¼ cup dried bonito flakes (dried fish)

Place water and seaweed in a stockpot. Bring to a boil and then remove from heat and remove the seaweed from the pot. Add the bonito flakes to the seaweed broth and let steep for about 5 minutes. Strain the stock and discard the used bonito flakes. Now you can make the Miso soup as directed below or make several variations by adding other items such as baby bok choy and sautéed onions.

Miso Soup:

4 cups Dashi stock from the recipe above

2 tablespoons light Shiro miso paste

10 ounces firm tofu, diced. You may prefer to fry the tofu in a little oil or butter first before adding to the soup.

1-2 cups thinly sliced Matsutake mushrooms. You can also use cultivated mushrooms such as Maitake, Enoki, and white or brown beech mushrooms if Matsutake mushrooms are not available.

Add soy sauce and/or toasted sesame oil to taste

1 green onion tops, thinly sliced for garnish

In a medium stockpot over high heat, combine the Dashi stock and Miso soup. Bring to a boil, then reduce to a simmer. Add the fried tofu and mushrooms. Simmer for 5 minutes. More flavor can be derived by adding soy sauce and/or toasted sesame oil to the soup. To serve, divide the soup among 4 bowls and sprinkle with green onion over the top. It is even better the second or third day since the flavors have now melded.

There is also a low-calorie noodle called 'shirataki' that is available in Asian markets and specialty grocery stores. It can be found made from yam or soy. If you use this ingredient prepare as directed. Then cut it in small pieces and add it to the finished soup. It will taste much better if allowed to absorb the flavor of the soup for a couple of days in the refrigerator.

Serves: 4