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FLAVOR’S BEST KEPT SECRET REVEALED
Umami Goes Mainstream with Mushrooms

NEW YORK (October 9, 2006) – The secret’s out. Forget what was said about the four basic tastes: sweet, salty, sour and bitter. There’s a fifth taste called “umami” and it’s making a big impression with the country’s top chefs.

Umami (pronounced oo-MAH-mee) is derived from the Japanese words umai, meaning “delicious” and mi meaning “essence,” but chefs and food lovers describe umami as a rich, mouth-filling, meaty and savory flavor that provides an extra satisfying taste to foods. Asians have talked about umami for centuries, but it’s only recently that science has proven that the brain experiences umami as a unique taste, just like the brain does with sweet, salty, sour and bitter.

So how can you tell when you taste umami? Think about the rich savory flavors experienced when you bite into a slice of pepperoni pizza, a perfectly cooked steak topped with sautéed mushrooms or stir-fried vegetables with soy sauce. Like salt, umami makes other foods taste better, even foods that have no umami themselves. “Umami extends the finish of savory food, making them linger on the palate longer and increasing the overall flavor,” said David Kasabian, author of *The Fifth Taste: Cooking with Umami*. “It also alters our perception of other tastes, making salt saltier, sweet sweeter, and bitter and sour less biting.”

The U-Bomb

What makes umami so unique from other flavors is that by combining several umami-rich ingredients into one dish, the overall flavor only gets better. On the contrary, a dish with numerous salty ingredients usually tastes too salty. Now that chefs are aware of umami, they’re using this technique of combining umami ingredients in restaurants to create dishes with intense umami flavor to give patrons a burst of flavor, which is called a “u-bomb.”

Topping the Charts

While many ingredients are umami, there is one that stands alone as the king of umami: mushrooms. Mushrooms not only deliver plenty of umami by themselves, they actually amplify the umami of other ingredients, an effect called “synergy.” This means that adding mushrooms to just about any savory dish will make all the other umami ingredients, and everything else in the dish, taste even better. Chef Tom Colicchio from Craft Restaurant and Bravo’s “Top Chef” uses mushrooms to create flavor-packed umami dishes in his own restaurants. “I have a full section on my menu devoted to mushrooms. I really enjoy the savory and meaty flavors they add. A juicy cut of steak tastes great, but by simply adding roasted or sautéed mushrooms, the umami effect doubles, leaving you truly satisfied,” said Colicchio. And, because a serving of 4-5 mushrooms provides a mere 20 calories, zero grams of fat, several B vitamins, copper, the antioxidant selenium, and potassium, they are a healthy addition to any dish.

Cooking with Umami at Home

Though the word umami may be unfamiliar to most home chefs, they have been tasting umami, enjoying it, even craving it, without really knowing what it is or what to call it. By knowing some basic and familiar umami-rich ingredients, Americans can now experiment and create their own umami dishes. “You don’t have to be an experienced chef to create umami at home. In fact, I bet most people have umami ingredients in their refrigerator right now,” said Colicchio. “Toss some pasta with olive oil, sautéed mushrooms and Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese and that’s umami in action. It’s that simple!” The combinations for umami are endless. Explore the fifth taste in your own kitchen by combining ingredients off the chart below. Ask yourself, “do I feel satisfied by the savory flavors in this dish?”, “do all the individual ingredients create a rich and fulfilling combination?” If yes, then you’ve created and experienced umami.

Examples of Umami-rich Ingredients

Poultry, Beef & Pork Turkey Italian prosciutto Braised beef Chicken and beef broth	Fish Anchovies Tuna Salmon Blue fish Oysters Shrimp	Mushrooms Portabella Crimini White Button Shiitake Morel Truffle oil	Garden Vegetables Corn Tomatoes Potatoes Red bell peppers Winter squash
Dairy & Cheeses Parmigiano-Reggiano Blue-veined cheese Emmentaler Cheddar Eggs	Soy & Soy Products Soy sauce Miso Tofu	Legumes White beans Black beans Lentils Black bean sauce	Condiments Fish Sauce Ketchup Worcestershire sauce Tomato salsa

As chefs and home cooks alike continue to experience the umami taste, it won't be surprising if umami-themed restaurants begin popping up throughout the country or even if umami dinner parties become the next big craze. The trend is catching on and making it easy for cooks with any level of experience to wow others with delicious, flavorful dishes.

For more information about how to turn everyday dishes into extraordinary dishes by adding mushrooms, visit www.makeitwithmushrooms.com.

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The Mushroom Council

The Mushroom Council is composed of fresh market producers or importers who average more than 500,000 pounds of mushrooms produced or imported annually. The United States Department of Agriculture officially declared September as "National Mushroom Month." The mushroom program is authorized by the Mushroom Promotion, Research and Consumer Information Act of 1990 and is administered by the Mushroom Council under the supervision of the Agricultural Marketing Service. Research and promotion programs help to expand, maintain and develop markets for individual agricultural commodities in the United States and abroad. These industry self-help programs are requested and funded by the industry groups that they serve. For more information on the Mushroom Council, visit www.mushroomcouncil.org.