

### Grouper with Shiitake Mushroom Sauce

Serves 4

Working (and total) time: about 35 minutes

one 1-lb grouper fillet (or monkfish or red snapper)  
 1/2 oz dried shiitake mushrooms, soaked in  
 3/4 cup very hot water for 20 minutes  
 1/4 cup dry sherry  
 2 tbsp. low-sodium soy sauce  
 2 tbsp. fresh lime juice  
 1 tsp. sugar  
 1 1/2 tbsp. cornstarch  
 2 tbsp. safflower oil  
 2 scallions, trimmed and thinly sliced  
 1 tbsp. julienned fresh ginger  
 2 garlic cloves, thinly sliced  
 1/2 tsp. freshly ground black pepper

Remove the mushrooms from their soaking liquid and slice them into thin pieces. Set the mushrooms aside.

Pour 1/4 cup of the soaking liquid into a mixing bowl, being careful to leave any grit from the mushrooms behind. Stir in the sherry, soy sauce, 1 tbsp of the lime juice and the sugar. Set the mixture aside.

Rinse the fillet under cold running water and pat it dry with paper towels. Rub the fillet with the remaining 1/2 tsp of the lime juice, then rub the cornstarch evenly over both sides of the fish.

Heat the oil in a large, heavy-bottomed skillet (preferably nonstick) over high heat. When the oil is hot, add the fish and sear it on one side for two minutes. Carefully turn the fillet over; sear it on the second side for two minutes. Transfer the fish to a plate.

Add the mushrooms, scallions, ginger, garlic and pepper to the hot skillet. Cook the mixture on high for one minute, then reduce the heat to low. Pour in the sherry mixture, replace the fillet, and cover the skillet. Steam the fish until it is opaque—about five minutes. Transfer the fish to a warmed serving dish.

### Shiitake in the United States

Until 1972, the only shiitake mushrooms available in the United States were dried specimens, since the importation of living *L. edodes* cultures was prohibited by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The living shiitake fungus was quarantined due to a confusion with a related fungus, *L. lepideus*, which was associated with decay of railroad ties. With the removal of the importation ban and the increase in production-orientated literature, a dramatic increase in commercial production of shiitake mushrooms has occurred (although there had

been scattered amateur interest in exotic mushrooms for years). The field of specialty mushroom-growing is greatly expanding and gourmet mushrooms are becoming profitable ventures, with a number of cooperative growers' organizations forming throughout the country.

The hardwood logs necessary for shiitake production are a key factor in mushroom production. In Japan—where land and forests are limited, and in Asia—where deforestation is increasing at an alarming rate, the future of traditional production methods is uncertain. However, in the United States and in Florida, particularly, there are ample stocks of oaks and other suitable hardwood species for use in shiitake production.

In Florida, low-quality, under-utilized hardwoods suitable for shiitake culture cover millions of acres and are virtually an unlimited source of substrate for mushroom production. With our ever-growing population, Florida is a major market for agricultural products and the potential is significant for an increased shiitake market share, especially by local producers who may take advantage of increased Japanese currency values.

Development of a successful, large-scale industry in the United States will depend on the availability of reliable spawn as well as the adaptation of production technology to local conditions. There are a number of spawn producers and most of the components for a profitable shiitake industry are present: basic research at a number of major institutions, production equipment suppliers, growing consumer interest, periodicals, and conferences.

### PRODUCTION

Successful shiitake production is not difficult but six key steps in cultivation must be carefully conducted to ensure an acceptable crop:

1. Production or acquisition of living shiitake inoculum and proper storage until use;
2. Proper selection, cutting, and handling of acceptable hardwood host logs;
3. Inoculating logs with shiitake spawn;
4. "Laying" the logs to favor fungal development;
5. Caring for the logs to maintain moisture content and reduce contamination;
6. Harvesting and storing the mushroom crop.