

The Mushroom Omelette

(Catherine Dousteysier-Khoze)

This is an old family recipe, with a personal tweak or two. It is versatile and, I think, very tasty. It certainly elevates the humble omelette to new, dizzying heights. No one who's ever tried it has found fault with it, that I know of.

Needless to say, the ingredients, eggs and mushrooms alike, must be impeccably fresh. The putrescent or *faisandé*, as the French say, has no place here. This is neither a recipe for hare stew or *civet de lièvre à l'ancienne*, nor some misplaced cultural ravings on the virtues of Icelandic hákarl (yes, *that* fermented shark treat).

You will need peacock eggs. 5 or 6 should suffice, for up to 4 people. I usually make this omelette for one or two carefully handpicked guests. If you do not have access to peacock eggs, which would be regrettable, I am unsure what to advise. Nothing can quite replace them. It has something to do with that unique gamey tang. Perhaps you could attempt to procure flamingo eggs. But I'm afraid that I'm letting my love of bold colours and semi-exotic birds speak here, I have never tried such eggs whose yolk, by the way, is yellow, not pink.

Where was I? Peacock eggs. As soon as you are back from the forest with your basket of mushroom goodies, go harvest the eggs. Don't forget to close the peacock pen behind you—peacocks are dreadfully aggressive birds—and repair to your kitchen den where you can treat yourself to a restorative drink (avoid yolk-based cocktails). If you are in a playful and munificent mood—and why shouldn't you be if you stumbled earlier on a patch of dapperling lepiotas in your favourite wood?—you can indulge in a spot of table decorating. Bring out the family silverware and your mother's precious Lalique vase—the grand one with Bacchantes. Place the iridescent peacock feathers you've just fought for in the vase as a centrepiece.

I don't have much to say on the subject of the mushrooms themselves.

Just cook the dapperling lepiotas, also known as *lepiota brunneoincarnata*, any way you fancy. Darling dapperlings. Dapper little caplings! Don't they sparkle, don't they shine, the still dewy precious things! With their creamy pink stems and fruity odour and white, pearly gills, who could resist them?

For preparation, I usually stick to the no-nonsense advice provided by Maestro Martino in his treatise on *The Art of Cooking (Libro de arte coquinaria, circa 1465)*:

Clean the mushrooms very well

Let them boil in water with two or three buttons of garlic and white bread (this is done because they are poisonous by nature)

Then remove them and drain the water so that they are dry, and then fry them in good oil or lard.

And when they are cooked, place over them various spices.

Everyone's here. The time has come to whisk the eggs.

Add a few twigs of saffron—I am partial to Kashmiri saffron of the Mongra grade. I know, pure extravagance. But you must send your guests off in style—it's the very least you can do.

Things may become a bit hazy during the cooking process.

Quite often, I can't remember that part.

Have you brought the crusty *pain de campagne* and leftover homemade wild boar pâté to the table? You will have to make do with it yourself—you are plagued with a mushroom allergy that does not allow you to partake of the gourmet treat. In between mouthfuls of fluffy omelette, they usually agree that your condition is nothing short of tragic.