

**THE** Marriage  
**OF** Mushrooms  
**AND** Garlic



*CHESTER AARON  
MALCOLM CLARK*

*with Suzanne N. Adams  
and Surachet Sangsana*

*PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROGER ADAMS*

# **THE MARRIAGE OF MUSHROOMS AND GARLIC**



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*To my mentor and teacher, the late Dr. Tsuneto Yoshii*  
—MALCOLM CLARK



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# Acknowledgments

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# Introduction

This is a book about the experiences of Malcolm Clark and Chester Aaron, who, independent of each other, have dedicated a large part of their lives to the development and distribution of unique varieties of mushrooms and garlic for the table as well as for laboratories, benefiting palate as well as body and soul. Their work has had an everlasting influence on food in America.

After much travel to exotic cultures, after years of research, after failures and successes in forests and fields, in kitchens and laboratories, Malcolm and Chester settled in Northern California a few miles from each other among their favorite centuries-old redwoods.

There, they have succeeded in expanding a worldwide appreciation for these various fungi we call mushrooms and this vari-tempered herb we call garlic.

Combining stories about two such different foods is best done by bringing them together in cuisine, where they are magically married. So, this is also a cookbook. The recipes have been prepared by two veteran chefs with years of experience in Eastern and Western cooking.

In cooking, mushrooms often retain their distinctive shape. Texture may change, but generally, their variety can be identified. Garlic, on the other hand, is often cut, chopped or minced, and its visual identity is totally lost in the final presentation.

Not so in this book. Garlic grows in hundreds of varieties, many of them extraordinarily beautiful. The unique photographs of some of the more colorful garlics are scattered throughout these pages and do not remain unnoticed, as they would on the plate.



WHY I AM WRITING THIS BOOK  
(BY CHESTER)



When I met Malcolm Clark twenty years ago, he was the founding president of Gourmet Mushrooms, and he took me on a tour of his laboratory and farm. Subsequent meetings over the years brought to life memories about my father (born in Russia, a farmer in his later life in Pennsylvania). Malcolm took me on journeys to hunt down safely edible wild mushrooms and I soon realized that here, indeed, was a Mushroom God. When he and I decided to write this book, I could only be grateful and confess that I had made a superior, and very beneficial, friend.

WHY I AM WRITING THIS BOOK  
(BY MALCOLM)

Often—at a dinner party, hanging out with friends or sitting in an airplane—the subject of mushrooms would come up, and I would find myself telling stories about collecting them, many times in the strangest of places. Getting shot at, for example, along the way down a mountain in Nepal after collecting the elusive medicinal mushroom *Cordyceps*.

One day, at a luncheon attended by chefs and prominent food writers, with Chester talking garlic and I mushrooms, several of the guests present suggested we owed the world a book. So, here you have it—two unusual guys telling their stories and adventures about the *Marriage of Mushrooms and Garlic* and the everlasting influence they have had on cuisine in North America and Europe.



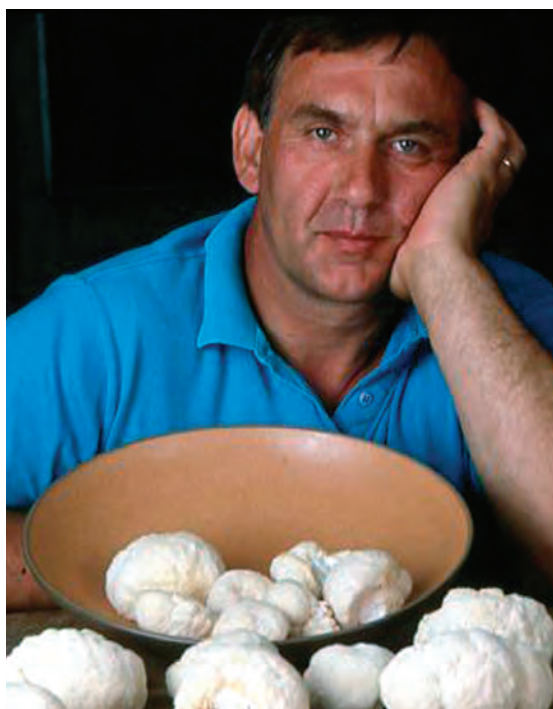
# Pom Pon Blanc Mushroom

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Pom pon blanc mushroom (AKA bear's tooth, old man's beard, monkey's brain, etc., or by its scientific name *Hericiium erinaceous*).

*Pom pon blanc* was the name I gave it at GMI after I had developed controlled cultivation methods; this was the first time this mushroom had ever been grown commercially. But credit must be shared with the renowned executive chef at Ernie's Restaurant in San Francisco, one of the finest restaurants of its day. When Chef Jacques Rober was first presented with this mushroom to develop some recipes, he said, "Ahh, *oui!* This must be pom pon blanc."

And so it was named, and as the first-time cultivators we claimed the right to name it. After all, you could not present it in a dish named, say, Dover sole marinara and old man's beard or Dover sole marinara and monkey's brain. That would certainly not sell. But sole marinara accompanied by pom pon blanc mushrooms sounds good and tastes delicious.



## TAMING THE SHROOM

No mushroom is closer to my heart than this, the pom pon blanc. Being credited as the first person in the world to cultivate this exotic fungus, I feel like its proud parent.

This is the short story of its birth.





In 1983, on a normal workday at GMI, a local mushroom aficionado brought in a beautiful mushroom for identification. I immediately recognized it as *Hericium erinaceus*, one of the so-called toothed fungi that really do not look like mushrooms at all, having no typical stem or cap. Instead, it's round, white, and covered with downward-pointing soft spines; it's often the size of a tennis ball but can grow to football size.

Having tasted this quite rare mushroom before, I became obsessed with the idea of growing it. I needed a fresh specimen so I could harvest either spores or a tissue culture. The gentleman who brought the mushroom in for identification kindly gave me its approximate location which was not too far away near a town called Glen Ellen in eastern Sonoma County, California.

I took the short drive over to the area in hopes of finding more mushrooms, and sure enough, there they were, growing on the side of a recently fallen oak tree. I rushed home, gathered up some instruments so I could tune into its growing habitat. I needed a light meter, a temperature/humidity probe, and a sleeping bag, as I intended to live with this mushroom so I could get to know it better. After all, I was going to have to duplicate its happy home if I ever hoped to grow it.

A few days later, I was back in the lab, having successfully taken a tissue culture, and the mycelium was growing happily on a sterilized Petri dish. This could be referred to as the pregnancy; the birth was several months away.

Finally, on some repaired-wood-chip growing media containers and in a controlled environment similar to the place I had found them, small round white mushrooms appeared and, over the next few days, matured into golf- to tennis ball-sized specimens. The pom pon blanc was born.

#### MEDICINAL VALUES

Apparently, some Native Americans would carry dried, powdered *Hericium* mushrooms in their medicine bags, and if they had a bleeding injury, they would sprinkle it on the wound to stop the bleeding. So it must have a styptic effect, which is supported by the fact the Chinese in recent years developed a pill used to treat stomach ailments, including bleeding ulcers. Other, more recent research indicates that *Hericium* is effective in treating several other medical conditions.





# Pom Pon Recipes

## **POM PON MUSHROOM IN PASTA**

*8 ounces fresh pom pon mushrooms*

When making pasta dishes such as a creamy alfredo, try taking a pom pon mushroom and tearing off thin strips. It will almost look like crabmeat. Then, when your pasta dish is

cooked and ready, mix in the strips of mushrooms and serve. They will even have a hint of crab flavor.





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### **POM-PON MUSHROOM TEMPURA**

*8 ounces fresh pom pon blanc mushrooms*

*<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> C. sifted plain (all purpose) flour*

*1 C. ice-cold water*

*1 large egg, beaten*

*2–3 ice cubes*

*1 C. cooking oil*

Slice mushrooms into 1-inch pieces.

To make the batter, pour the ice-cold water into a mixing bowl, add the beaten egg and mix well. Add the flour and very lightly fold in with a pair of chopsticks or a fork. *Do not beat.* The batter should still be quite lumpy. Add the ice cubes.

Heat cooking oil until the temperature reaches about 300° F—it will sizzle when you drip a bit of batter mix into it.

Gently coat the slices of mushrooms in the batter one at a time and place them into the hot oil. Remove when lightly browned and drain on a paper towel. They are now ready to eat.

Serve with other tempura ingredients such as prawns, sliced fish, shiitake mushrooms, vegetables.

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# Oyster Mushroom

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Also known by its scientific name *Plurotus* and in this case *Plurotus ostreatus*. It is generally found on dead or dying trees and stumps. There are dozens of variants of this bordering-on-pretty mushroom with colors ranging from white, cream and brown to gun-metal blue, yellow, and pink. And then there's my oyster mushroom: the *baby blue oyster*.

It was baptized this by some friends and myself; I refer to them as my naming committee. We cook up a batch of a mushroom in various ways, and then, armed with an appropriate bottle of wine, we feast and discuss what it should be called. I don't always get my way, but in this case I did. We called it the baby blue oyster because it was small (no more than an inch across) and reminded one of my friends of the name given Frank Sinatra (Old Blue Eyes). Anyway, this is the name that stuck and has been marketed successfully for years and years.

Like the pom pon blanc, this mushroom also has a special place in my heart.

I was on a trip to Indonesia, and while driving around, I stopped at a small market a few miles up the road from the town of Ubud on the island of Bali. The shapes, colors, and smells were something to behold. Fruits, vegetables, roots and spices of all shapes and sizes, and there, next to some exotic red fruit, was a cluster of blue oyster mushrooms. That was it, I had to know more and, if possible, go to the place they





had been found and collect some specimens. I was able to find someone to do the translating for me, and arrangements were made for me to meet up with the person who had collected the mushrooms.

At first light the following morning, I woke up and soon was traveling up the hill to meet my guide-to-be. When I reached the market, which was not yet set up, there was my man, waiting anxiously to take

me into the forest to find the mushrooms.

It was about an hour's walk up a damp, misty path, constantly looking out for snakes and biting insects. Finally, we reached our destination, and all over the base of an old tree were bunches of this beautiful mushroom.

I grabbed my camera, took some shots and made a few notes in my notebook, gathered up a bunch of nice, fresh young specimens and headed back down the path to the market. After reaching the market and my car, I started to change my soaking wet shirt and was horrified to find that several small leeches had worked their way under my clothing and clung to my skin. It took almost an hour using salt and toothpicks to get the stubborn little creatures off.

Despite the discomfort, it was okay—I had my mushrooms.

Back at the hotel, I got out my little agar test tubes (never leave home without them) and created a mini-lab environment. With a razor blade, I dissected out small sections of mushroom, lit an alcohol-soaked cotton ball and carefully passed them through the flame. I then placed them into the test tubes and closed them up tightly. The tissue culture collection was complete.

I finished the remainder of my trip photographing and collecting orchids (my second passion).

By the time I returned to the states and was back in the lab, the insides of the agar tubes were covered with mycelium, and I had what I needed to create spawn and seed out some growing material. About four weeks later, lots of little oyster mushrooms covered the growth material (mainly wood chips).

They turned out to be fairly easy to grow, and we had now added a new mushroom to our fungus bank.

#### RECIPES

Mushroom-and-Garlic Chowder and Oyster Mushroom Fritters.

#### MEDICINAL VALUES

The oyster mushroom (*Pleurotus ostreatus*) contains a substance called mevinolin that can be effective in lowering high cholesterol. It also contains many beneficial active enzymes.

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# Oyster Mushroom Recipes

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## **MUSHROOM AND GARLIC CHOWDER**

*1/4 pound of bacon*  
*2 C. sliced celery*  
*1 onion, chopped*  
*8 ounces of oyster mushrooms*  
*1/4 C. flour*  
*1 C. chicken or vegetable broth*  
*1 C. cream*  
*1/2 C. milk*  
*4 cloves of minced garlic*  
*salt and white pepper to taste*

Cut the bacon into  $1/2$  inch slices. Sauté until crisp. Set aside. Reserve 2 tbsp. bacon fat. Place the bacon fat in a medium-sized heavy-bottomed saucepan. Add the celery, onion and mushrooms. Cook on medium heat while stirring until done. Sprinkle with the flour and stir to combine well. Add the broth and cook until thickened. Add the cream and enough of the milk to obtain a consistency to your liking. Add the garlic and salt and pepper to taste. Spoon into soup bowls and garnish with the crispy bacon bits.



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### **OYSTER MUSHROOM FRITTERS**

*8 ounces fresh medium-sized oyster mushrooms*  
*2 egg whites*  
*1/2 C. all-purpose flour*  
*Cooking oil*

#### **For the dipping sauce**

*2 tbsp. fish sauce*  
*2 tbsp. lime juice*  
*1 clove of garlic, minced*  
*Pinch of dry chili flakes*

Separate the oyster mushrooms to bite-size. If you need to clean them, use a brush and do not wash. Heat cooking oil until the temperature reaches about 300° F.

Deep-fry the mushroom.

Dip each mushroom in egg white and dust in the flour. Gently slip it into the oil and cook until it goes crisp then turn over to the other side. Drain on kitchen paper.

Arrange the mushrooms on a plate. Serve immediately with a dipping sauce of your choice.

# How This All Began

## by Chester Aaron

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I grew up in a coal-mining village in western Pennsylvania during the Great Depression. My father, an emigre from Russia, owned the only store in the village; and although the shelves were often empty, the produce boxes were usually filled with fruits and vegetables and herbs from our garden.

The plant in that garden most treasured by both my mother and father: garlic.

My mother, a slight and beautiful and deceptively delicate emigre from Poland (they met on the boat) accompanied the sopranos who sang opera every Saturday on our large Philco radio (Station KDKA, Pittsburgh). When she was not cooking or cleaning or listening to opera, she was





crocheting elaborate edgings for pillow slips or doilies, works of art that won prizes every summer at the Butler County Fair.

My father, when he was not lamenting the lack of income to fill the shelves of the store and guarantee additional income, was in the field behind our house, planting or harvesting.

My brothers, as they grew up, were never interested in the garden. They either were in college or working in the steel mills in town, three miles to the south of our village. I, as I grew up, leaped at every opportunity to work in the field at my father's side. His and my favorite food to plant and nourish and harvest and eat: garlic.

But garlic was not there just to be eaten.

When I or anyone in the family suffered bruises or cuts or had to fight off colds or other mysterious ailments, my mother, as well as my father, relied on garlic.

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My father: “*Idi! Vozmi mne chesnok!*” “Go! Get me the garlic!”

If and when one of my brothers or my mother or I had an earache, we bent or leaned into the position that would best permit my father to squeeze a peeled and crushed garlic clove into the target ear.

We needed no medical ointment in the house. Whenever we cut or bruised ourselves, a peeled clove, cut in half to expose two moist surfaces, would be rubbed on the injury, twice, three, four times a day, for a day, for two days, for three days. The pain would flee immediately, and recovery would continue forever.

“I got piles,” my father announced one evening at the supper table. “Chester! *Idi! Vozmi mne chesnok!*”

In Pennsylvania English: “Chester! Go! Get me the garlic.”

Piles: the local term for hemorrhoids.

I went to the kitchen cupboard where, in three or four bags, my mother and father stored that year’s harvest. Available: three or four or five varieties, bulbs with skins white to pink to red; bulbs with four or five large cloves or ten or twelve smaller ones.

“The red,” my father called. “Bring the red.”

I selected the bag with the bulbs encased in the red skins, removed one bulb, took it to my father. Using his thumbnail, Pappa dug free two cloves from the collection of eight or ten red-skinned bodies. He bit off the tip of one clove, used his fingernails to remove the skin, rolled the clove in his fingers to soften the interior.



How This All Began



Taking a large swallow of his hot black Swee-Touch-nee tea, he stood at the side of the supper table and unbuckled his belt. After his trousers dropped, he shimmied his shorts to the floor, bent over, shoved the entire clove inside his ass as far up as he could shove it.

“Oy,” he said. “It burns. It works.”

Taking no chances, he processed a second clove and, bent over again, inserted same.

After four or five minutes, as the silence continued, Poppa reached to the table, lifted his cup, swallowed another gulp of his black tea. Then he straightened, pulled up his shorts, pulled up his pants, buckled his belt.

“Done,” he said. “*Est besser und besser.*”

I remember my mother performing the same ritual twice, but each time she required privacy. She processed the treatment in the room in which she and my father slept.

Many years later, in combat in Germany, I was more than once reminded of my mother and father’s love of garlic for the treatment of pain and/or cut or bruise.

Russian soldiers did not have penicillin in their medical kits.

How many times ... ten? twenty? ... did I see a wounded Russian soldier, pants down or sleeves up, wounds on arms or legs or bodies bleeding, reach into a pocket and remove a clove or two of garlic and use his teeth to peel the clove and apply the moist surface and rub and rub.

I could hear my father’s voice, always, each time: “*Est besser und besser.*”

Now, almost seventy years since that war and those memories, I lift one of my so-called garlic books or I look at my beautiful garlic poster. (Thank you, Ten Speed Press; thank you, Random House!) I see my mother’s angelic smile as she accepts another award for her art, I hear my father’s “*Est besser und besser ...*”



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