

6, Rue Mission de France

*Bienvenue
le Dîd
Blen!*





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I recently welcomed an interesting and uniquely beautiful mushroom into my kitchen, one I had not had the opportunity to taste or cook with—the blue foot. If you haven't seen a blue foot, you'll be struck by their coloring with dusty caps and intensely blue-violet stems. The highly prized pied bleu, as it is known in France, is the cultivated cousin of the wood blewit. Both varieties are cherished for their woody flavor and firm though somewhat delicate texture that holds up beautifully in long simmered dishes.

The blue foot mushroom is native to and popular in Europe, particularly in France where it is at home in classic French dishes—from meaty stews to rich sauces. The wood blewit is also native to North America and often found in

broadleaved and coniferous woodland areas in the fall where they thrive in decomposing leaves and twigs, returning year after year in their favorite spots. Be careful to check the spore print on these mushrooms, the spores should be a dusty pink. Darker, reddish-brown spores could indicate their poisonous lookalike, the *Cortinarius*. The blewit fruiting season is long, throughout cool but not freezing weather. Depending on your local climate you may be able to cultivate blewits in your garden or backyard on moist straw or wood chips (and has been the subject of more than one cultivation articles in FUNGI).

Many chefs and foragers seem to find their flavor to be mild and delicate. Wild, foraged mushrooms usually have a more intense flavor than cultivated, so I was surprised to find my colorful, cultivated bounty intensely earthy, so much so

it might be considered off-putting for some. After tasting, I decided to pair the mushrooms with bold flavors—in a pastry tart topped with creamy and robust goat cheese and in a rich venison stew with juniper and red wine. If you find delicately flavored blewits, whether foraged or cultivated, you might choose to serve them with eggs, in light cream sauces with poultry or fish, or simply sautéed in butter with a sprinkle of fresh herbs. *Bon appétit!*

A golden, flaky mushroom tart made with cheese and puff pastry is always a hit! I love Boucheron goat cheese and picked this variety for its earthy undertones that complement the deep flavor of blue foot mushrooms. Freezing the cheese briefly will make it easy to cut into pieces. A substitute for Boucheron would be another aged goat cheese of your choice or switch it up and use a nutty melting cheese like Gruyère with a mixture of shiitakes and cremini. Make individual tarts if you like using a round pastry cutter or cut into individual squares.

Rustic "Puff" Tart with Blue Foot Mushrooms and Boucheron Cheese

4 tablespoons butter, divided

2 small leeks, trimmed, halved, and sliced 1/4" white and light green parts only, about one cup

1/4 teaspoon salt

2 garlic cloves, minced

10 ounces sliced blue foot mushrooms (or substitute), about 4 cups

2 teaspoons fresh thyme leaves

1/4 cup heavy cream

Salt and pepper

3 ounces Boucheron cheese, 1/2 inch diced

One sheet puff pastry

Egg wash

Heat two tablespoons of the butter in a skillet over medium-low heat, add the leeks, sprinkle with the salt and sauté until the leeks are tender, about 5–6 minutes, then add the garlic and cook for



an additional 1–2 minutes. Remove from the pan and set aside.

Add the remaining butter to the skillet, raise the heat to medium high and sauté the mushrooms until golden. Add the cream and continue to cook for a minute or two. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

For puff pastry, preheat the oven to 400 F degrees, or according to package directions.

Roll out the pastry dough. Fold the edges of the dough over once for big, puffed edges. (Alternately score a border about an inch from the edge using a sharp knife, being careful not to cut through the pastry. This will allow the edges to rise). Prick the inner surface of the pastry with a fork to keep it from rising. Spread the leeks and mushrooms evenly onto the dough and sprinkle the top with the cheese. Brush with edges with the egg wash and bake for 12–14 minutes or until golden and puffed.

A hearty and easy to prepare venison stew perfect for chilly fall nights in the style of classic French bourguignon with

bacon, red wine, blue foot mushrooms, and crushed juniper berries. The red currant jam adds a nice touch of sweetness. Serve with fluffy, buttery mashed potatoes or a crusty slice of toasted French bread. A glass or two of Pinot Noir, a Rhône red, or even a Malbec would be a good choice to offer with this dish.

Venison-Blue Foot Stew

You will need:

A large Dutch oven or heavy-lidded pot

1/4 pound bacon, cut horizontally into small strips

2 pounds venison, leg or shoulder, cut into 2–3 inch pieces

Salt and pepper

Flour

2 tablespoons olive oil

1 pound blue foot or cremini mushrooms, quartered

1 large onion, roughly chopped

3–4 carrots, peeled and cut into

2 inch pieces

3 cloves garlic, sliced

3 tablespoons double-concentrated tomato paste

1 bottle red wine, (Pinot Noir or a good, full-bodied red)

4 cups beef stock

2 bay leaves

3–4 sprigs fresh thyme

2 sprigs fresh rosemary

4–5 crushed juniper berries

1 tablespoon red currant jelly

Cook the bacon in a skillet over medium heat until crispy. Remove from heat and transfer the bacon to paper towels, keeping the bacon fat in the skillet.

Place the venison in a bowl, season with salt and pepper and dust lightly with flour, turning to coat all sides.

Place the skillet back on the stove over medium-high heat and add the olive oil to the pan. When the oil begins to shimmer, add the venison and sear on all sides. Work in batches to prevent overcrowding, adding more oil as necessary.

Add the cooked meat, bacon, and vegetables to a large Dutch oven over medium heat. Add the tomato paste and cook until the paste turns a deep red, stirring often. Pour in the red wine and reduce by half, then add the stock, bay leaves, thyme, rosemary, and juniper berries. Bring to a boil, lower the heat, reduce to a simmer and cover. Transfer to an oven to finish cooking at 275 F degrees or continue to cook covered on the stovetop at a low simmer, stirring occasionally. Cook until tender, about 1 1/2 to 2 hours. Remove the bay leaves,



thyme, and rosemary sprigs, stir in the currant jelly and season with salt and pepper.

Hachis parmentier is the French version of shepherd's pie, and is a super easy way to turn leftovers into a delicious new dish. If you made those creamy mashed potatoes to go with the stew and have some leftover, you're in luck! The amounts below are approximate, you may skip the bottom layer of potatoes if you like.

Venison-Blue Foot Hachis Parmentier

2 cups leftover stew

3-4 cups mashed potatoes

*1/2 cup grated Emmentaler, Gruyere, or
Parmesan cheese*

Chop the leftover stew by hand or briefly pulse in a food processor. You'll want the mixture to be chopped into small pieces, not puréed. Butter a casserole dish, spread half of the potatoes on the bottom, spread a layer of the meat mixture, and top with the remaining potatoes. Add a generous sprinkle of grated Gruyère over the top and bake for about 35-40 minutes at 375 F or until the top is golden brown. ↑



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