



# Dreaming of Morels

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**D**uring these months of long and restricted physical activity and the inability to pursue many of our normal routines, I began to reminisce about our forays, our hunting trips at home and abroad, and moreover, the variety of culinary experiences of the many years gone by. This led me to think forward to the spring hoping that our lives would return to normalcy and the anticipation of the first forays for the always elusive morels that will, once more, reward us with the thrills of the hunt and with gustatory delights derived from our findings.

In this edition of FUNGI, I've decided to take us on a *virtual tour* of a few locations that would reward us with a new gustatory experience inspired by new combinations of flavors derived from classic dishes modified by the



addition of preserved fungi. My tour includes three continents with the same number of classic and simple local dishes, modified by the addition of our precious and delectable fungus.

We began this virtual tour in Chincoteague Island, Virginia, selecting the local specialty: salt oysters and the renowned oyster stew for a starter. We then “fly” to Lorraine, France, for its classic and celebrated quiche Lorraine. Our last stop will be South America, where local classic ingredients of corn, red peppers, and cheese are frequently mixed for stuffing diverse dishes.

## Oyster Stew

Soak dry morels in water for a few hours; strain and preserve the soaking water; rinse the morels well. Shuck oysters and reserve their juice. In a small pot, enamel or Teflon coated, sauté the morels, preferably with clarified butter for a few minutes and then add a bit of chopped pearl onions and/or the white part of leeks, continue until soft. Add

a few previously cooked corn kernels, peas, and diced carrots. Then add the reserved oyster juice, some of the morel soaking water, and a splash of white wine. Bring to a boil and finish by adding some cream, or milk, and take off the fire. Salt and pepper to taste. So simple!

Enjoy this stew with good bread, fresh or toasted to your liking, accompanied by a cold glass of a good Spanish Albariño. You could add a side of *amuse bouche* (tidbits) of small canapes of buttered toast with *foie gras patê*, Piquillo peppers (roasted red peppers), and a large Sicilian olive will also fit the bill nicely.

We fly next to France for a classical and ancient dish, apparently first known in the 1800s but maybe as old as the 1600s. By 1920 this marvelous (and simple) dish had been introduced in the USA.

## Morel Quiche Lorraine

This traditional dish can be enjoyed hot or cold, in my opinion. You can make from scratch or purchase a nice thin pie crust to hold the filling. Bake the pie crust for about 8–10 minutes depending on the type, (covered with wax paper or aluminum foil weighted with glass beads or dry beans to prevent excessive puffing). You want to bake long enough

to just dry the surface and to prevent sogging when the fresh ingredients are added. Take crust out of the oven and let it cool awhile before filling it.

Whip three or four eggs in a bowl. Next, add about 1/2 cup of cream cheese or cottage cheese, and 1/4 cup of milk or cream, and mix well. Also add some of the morel soaking water for enhanced flavor, depending on the pie crust size. Place half the mixed creamy ingredients on the pie crust and distribute the solids on top, whatever you like: steamed asparagus, bits of lean prosciutto, morels, and then add grated cheese on top. For cheese, Gruyère is especially good but gouda, cheddar, feta, Swiss, and Monterey Jack all work well. Bake in a 325–350 F oven until the top is golden. The quiche may puff depending on the humidity of the ingredients but will deflate after cooling. Serve with a side of mixed greens salad. You might accompany this dish with a light red wine like a Tempranillo, Chianti, or Cabernet.

We now fly down to South America where stuffings for different dishes often include corn, red peppers, onions, and cheese. Their addition to tender wild game adds intriguing flavors to a main dish for an enhanced gustatory experience.

## Roasted Quails Stuffed with Morels and Fond de Veau

I prefer to parboil the quails for a few minutes to tenderize the meat a bit. Let them cool before filling. Chopped shallots are sautéed in butter together with corn kernels (previously boiled on the cob), and with some pieces of roasted sweet red peppers as well. Grated cheese is added to the mixture with salt and pepper to taste. The quails are then stuffed with the mixture and the back opening is closed together with the help of a toothpick. Then, each quail is wrapped with a strip of bacon and roasted until done.

The quails are then plated and napped with a sauce made with sautéed morels added to a *fond de veau* sauce (veal sauce) base. A side of zucchini sautéed with rosemary completes the meal. This dish certainly calls for a Cabernet Sauvignon, a Pinot Noir, or a Barolo to cleanse the palate and stimulate digestion!

Back home, my virtual tour ends with a piece of Cougar Gold—a sharp white cheddar from the Washington State University, followed by an espresso ... and chased by an Italian Grappa!

**Keep on dreaming! Bon Appetit!** 🍴

