

Mushroom Soup with Tofu and Toasted Garlic

Serves 4

Feels impossible to make such a ridiculously craveable, highly drinkable broth from just mushrooms, water, and soy sauce, but here we are, I promise you it's true. As I mentioned, the beauty here is in the simplicity-- a bright, salty, tangy, and shockingly multi-dimensional soup made in under 30 minutes (the maximum amount of time I'm willing to wait for something when I'm starving, tired, hungover, or a combination of all three), but as always, feel free to make it your own*. I won't downplay the role of tofu here, it's a pretty large one. If you simply can't stand the texture (I don't relate! To me, there is nothing better to me than that custardy soft pudding-like jiggle), then leave it out and serve this soup over cooked noodles, pasta, or a bowl of rice.

¼ cup olive oil, plus more

4 cloves garlic, thinly sliced, plus one for grating

Kosher salt

1 pound mixed mushrooms such as oyster, maitake, baby bella, shiitake, cut or torn into bite-sized pieces**

Freshly ground black pepper or crushed red pepper flakes

1 medium leek or 6 scallions, thinly sliced

3 tablespoons soy sauce, plus more

1 tablespoon distilled white or rice wine vinegar, plus more

1 12 ounce package soft or silken tofu

Crushed red pepper flakes, chili oil, chili crisp, toasted sesame oil, etc.

1. Heat oil in a large pot over medium heat. Add sliced garlic and cook, stirring occasionally, until they're lightly golden brown, resembling little potato chips, 2–3 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, remove garlic, and set aside in a small bowl or on top of a folded paper towel; season with salt and set aside.

2. Add mushrooms to the pot and season with salt and pepper. Cook, tossing occasionally, until they're nicely and deeply browned. The browning of the mushrooms is what's going to deliver 80% of your flavor here, so do not skip this step (if you feel like there is a lot of sticking and/or scorching, add a drizzle of olive oil, mushrooms love oil). Add crushed red pepper flakes here if you'd like it spicy.

3. Add about ¾ of the leeks or scallions to the pot and cook a minute or two, just to soften slightly. Add soy sauce, letting it bubble and reduce slightly for a few seconds before adding the vinegar, the finely grated clove of raw garlic and 5 cups of water. Season this with more pepper and bring to a simmer.

4. Let this soup gently simmer for 5–10 minutes or so, just to completely meld the flavors, give the mushrooms a chance to acclimate to their new home and concentrate the broth ever so slightly.

5. Open your package of tofu and free it from the package or peel back the thin layer of plastic that holds it in. Using a spoon, break off large pieces of the tofu and gently lower them into the broth to lightly poach (not unlike this [soondubu-jiigae](#)). Without boiling (you don't want the tofu to disintegrate), gently cook 5–10 minutes until tofu is warmed through, firmed up a bit and seasoned with the broth. After a few minutes, taste the broth and season with more vinegar and soy sauce as needed.

6. Spoon the soup into bowls, making sure to get plenty of mushrooms, broth and tofu in there. Scatter with a bit of the raw leeks or scallions as well as the toasted garlic, and if you, too, are “going for it,” top with crushed red pepper flakes, your favorite chile crisp/chile oil, sesame oil, or [this frizzled ginger](#).

*As always, feel free to make this very basic base recipe your own. Some ideas:

Adding ginger along with the garlic to fry, and grated raw at the end.

Add chili flake while sauteing the mushrooms or finish with chili oil.

Use vegetable, chicken, turkey or beef broth instead of water.

Add other vegetables like thinly sliced fennel, torn leafy greens, thinly sliced winter squash to simmer with the mushrooms till tender or wilted.

Leave the tofu out of it and eat over cooked noodles, pasta or rice.

**Use a mix of mushrooms for the best flavor and textural contrast.

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