

LUKAS VOLGER

Creamed Mushroom and Hazelnut Soup

Serves 4

3/4 cup hazelnuts

2 to 3 tablespoons olive oil, plus extra for drizzling

4 shallots, minced; or 2 medium leeks, white and pale green parts thinly sliced; or 1 medium onion, minced

Salt

Pinch crushed red pepper flakes

1 pound white button or crimini mushrooms, thinly sliced

1/4 cup sherry, dry vermouth, or dry white wine

1/4 ounce dried porcini mushrooms, coarsely chopped or crumbled

4 cups vegetable broth (see above—I'm a fan of Better Than Bullion Seasoned Vegetable Base)

1 to 2 teaspoons sherry vinegar (optional)

Freshly ground black pepper

Hazelnut-Rosemary topping (optional, recipe below)

To toast the hazelnuts, place them in an oven-safe skillet or baking pan and roast in the oven (or toaster oven!) for about 15 minutes at 325 F, until golden brown. To skin them, spread them out on a clean kitchen towel, then bundle the nuts up like a little satchel and rub them against one another from the outside of the towel—most of the skins will fleck off. Put the skinned nuts in the pitcher that attaches to a blender and cover with about 1 cup of boiling water, and let stand for about 20 minutes as you work on the rest of the soup.

In a pot or Dutch oven, warm the olive oil—up to 3 tablespoons; less if you please—over medium heat, then add the shallots, a pinch of salt, and the pepper flakes. Cook for about 5 minutes, until softened. Add the button mushrooms and raise the heat slightly. Cook for 10 to 15 minutes, maybe a little more depending on how thickly sliced they are, stirring periodically, until they've released all their liquid, and then it has cooked off and the pan is dry. Pour in the sherry, stirring to loosen any stuck bits, then add the stock and the porcini mushrooms. Bring to a boil, then lower the heat and simmer for 25 minutes.

Blend the hazelnuts (and their soaking liquid) until very smooth. Carefully add the contents of the soup pot to the blender, working in batches if necessary, and pulse so that the soup is coarsely pureed. (How smoothly pureed you'd like the soup to be is your call—you can also skip

pureeing the soup and just whisk the creamed hazelnuts into the pot.) Return to the pot and reheat. Taste, and if you think it needs a little zing, stir in 1 teaspoon vinegar, and adding more to taste. Season with salt and pepper, and serve hot, drizzled with olive oil and a few grinds of pepper, and sprinkled with hazelnut-rosemary topping if desired.

Hazelnut-Rosemary Topping

2 tablespoons toasted hazelnuts

1 teaspoon rosemary sprigs

A few swipes lemon zest

Pinch salt

In a mortar and pestle, combine all ingredients and pound until coarsely ground. Alternatively, mince everything together on a cutting board.