

## Dining & Wine

THE MINIMALIST

# The Flavor of Spring

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IN an ideal world, here's what a spring dish might look like: you take morels from your foraging trip, cream and butter from your cow, and asparagus, shallots and herbs from your garden. You combine them in any way that makes sense to you, and then you thank the forest, the cow and your backyard for providing such amazing bounty.



Sound familiar? Not to me, either. But there are ways to come close. Start with a combination of dried morels or porcini and fresh shiitakes or button mushrooms. The more morels you use, the more intense the flavor. But I've made this with as few as four and not been disappointed.

Get the best asparagus, not too thin; this is the right time of year for it, after all. Ditto with the butter and cream, and don't skimp on either. Use fresh chervil (preferred, but difficult to find) or tarragon — do not settle for dried here.

The result will be a French classic, a combination of strong, uncommon flavors that could have been designed to go together.

Combining dried and fresh mushrooms is a reliable way to transfer the exotic flavor of truly wild mushrooms to tamer domesticated ones. Using the soaking liquid for the morels makes it certain that none of their essence goes to waste.

The procedure itself is straightforward, with one exception: half-cook the asparagus first, so that it finishes in the cream, therefore absorbing a bit of it and becoming tender yet not mushy.

What's half-cooked asparagus? Just a stage or so past raw. If the cream mixture threatens to dry out before the asparagus is done, add more cream, more mushroom soaking liquid or water.

It's worth mentioning that this mixture makes a terrific pasta sauce. But speaking of spring, that might be painting the lily.