

*Autumn is the most flamboyant season in the Estonian kitchen. Produce from gardens, fields and forests bring rich colours and flavours to the table. Harvest and potatoes arrive in the garner. Carrots, turnips, cabbage and beetroot are picked from their beds. Beautiful garlands are braided of onions and garlic. Red-cheeked apples and apple dishes create the autumn mood in the kitchen. To enrich the menu, mushrooms, nuts, lingonberries are picked from the forest, cranberries from mires and bogs. The meat of the animals farmed on pastures is as good as it gets in autumn. The hunting season brings elk and wild boar meat or even some rarer game on gourmands' tables. The flavours of autumn are diverse and nuance-rich.*

Estonian forests offer a rich selection of edible mushrooms in autumn. Going to pick mushrooms has remained an eagerly anticipated autumn activity for many people living in towns or in the country to this day. Tens of species of russula, boletus and milk mushrooms are spellbinding for their rich colours alone. All mushroom species offer different textural and flavour nuances. Further in the past, peasants ate mushrooms in Eastern and Southern Estonia, they became more common on the dinner table a bit more than a century ago. In town and manor kitchens, however, the history of mushroom dishes is considerably longer. Mushrooms are marinated, salted, dried and even acidified. They are added to salads, pie fillings, casseroles, sauces, soups.

The most important farm work in autumn is potato harvest, potatoes have been stocked up for the family for winter throughout the times. In about two centuries, the plant that was first received with suspicion has become almost as irreplaceable as bread. Potatoes with white sauce with meat or fish on the side have been the most common dish for Estonians for a long time. The important place of the potato is evidenced by the wide variety of methods used to cook it: boiling peeled or unpeeled potatoes, steamed, fried, baked potatoes, French fries, potatoes baked in bonfire ashes are a special treat and mashed potatoes a general favourite. Hardly any special occasions go by with no potato salad served.

Traditionally, there was also an abundant selection of meat on the table in autumn as this was the time of slaughtering the animals that were not going to be kept over the winter. Meat was always served in farms at the weddings held in autumn and for holidays: for example, lamb was had for Michaelmas Day and goose for the Goose Feast.

In addition to apples, pears, plums, prunes are picked from orchards in autumn. They are best enjoyed fresh, but some are still used to make jam, compotes or juice. Distilling berry or fruit wine is a centuries-old tradition in Estonia. Some gardeners even defy the climate and pick grapes. The fruit picked from the garden, field or forest invite to experiment, find new exciting flavours and colour combinations and store them for the winter in jars.