

by insect pollinators. One company in Mexico, however, figured out a way to cultivate it and sells a canned version to restaurateurs and purveyors of fine foods around the globe.

More recently, several industrious North Americans decided that canned simply does not compare to flash-frozen, or better yet, fresh huitlacoche, and have embarked on experimental projects to produce the delicacy locally. In Florida, for example, a farmer supplies restaurants with frozen huitlacoche cultivated in his sweet-corn fields. His product tastes sweeter than Mexican huitlacoche because Mexicans use a less sweet, chewier corn for their tortillas. When asked to explain the difference in taste, Zarela Martinez considered this for a moment and offered, "It's like the difference between a Granny Smith and a Red Delicious apple." She added that many North Americans have only tried the sweeter version of huitlacoche.

But an agronomist-turned-nurse practitioner-turned weekend farmer near Amherst, MA is determined to raise the more authentic huitlacoche. Wm Levine, an avid wild mushroom forager, taught mushroom cultivation at The Farm School Apprentice Program in North Orange MA and became their "mushroom guy," noting that "I've always been into smut." Last year he tested 18 varieties of corn and settled on white corn, used in Mexico, and a dent, or field corn, both of which are highly susceptible to fungal infection.

He then obtained huitlacoche cultures from a plant pathologist and grew it in petri dishes in the microbiology lab at UMASS-Amherst. From that stock, Levine created a liquid culture based on boiled potatoes, which keeps the fungus well-fed and ready to procreate. With a seltzer bottle, and a syringe with a 14-gauge hypodermic needle designed for large farm animal vaccination, he has tread up and down the rows of corn on his two-acre farm, injecting the silk of each ear with this mixture. He estimates that by the time the huitlacoche season ends in October he will have handled his 80,000 corn plants at least eighteen times. He also says he's living on ibuprofen.

When his corn is ready, Levine will harvest it, and slice the huitlacoche-laden kernels from the cobs with a circular knife. They will be weighed and packaged and his teenage daughter will stamp each box with Levine's logo, a raven standing on an ear of corn. He already has made arrangements with a variety of wholesalers and retailers who will distribute and sell his unique product across the country. For those chefs and home cooks who have yet to be amazed by the heavenly aroma and flavor of huitlacoche, he plans to include three recipes in every box.

Huitlacoche can be purchased from directly from Wm. He can be contacted at [waglevcott@earthlink.net](mailto:waglevcott@earthlink.net). ❖

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## CHICKEN BREASTS STUFFED WITH HUITLACOCHÉ

Recipe from Tu Y Yo Restaurant, Somerville

Serves 8

8 chicken breasts, pounded between wax paper until flat  
Salt and pepper  
3 garlic cloves, minced, divided  
¼ c unsalted butter, softened  
1 large onion  
1 lb fresh huitlacoche  
2 cups fresh corn kernels  
10 stems epazote (or Cilantro), finely chopped  
4 large Poblano chili peppers  
1 cup water  
1 low-salt or unsalted chicken bouillon  
¼ cup heavy cream  
½ cup grated Manchego cheese  
Salt and pepper, to taste

Sprinkle the chicken breasts with salt, pepper and ⅓ of the minced garlic. Let rest, about 10 minutes.

In a large sauté pan, heat the butter and onion over medium heat until the onion is translucent, about 3 minutes. Add ⅓ of the garlic, the corn kernels, and huitlacoche and cook, stirring occasionally, over medium heat, until the mixture forms a soft paste, about 5 minutes. Add the epazote and let cool.

Place a tablespoon or more of the huitlacoche mixture along one long edge of each chicken breast, roll the chicken into a cylinder and secure with toothpicks to prevent filling from leaking. Refrigerate.

Place the chilies on a cookie sheet lined with tin foil and broil for 2 or 3 minutes, until the skin wrinkles and blisters. Keep turning the chilies until all sides have been charred. Put chilies into a paper bag and let steam and cool, about 10 minutes. Peel and de-vein the chilies. Remove seeds.

Preheat oven to 300 degrees.

In a blender or Cuisinart, purée chilies, water, remaining garlic, bouillon and cream. Pour this mixture into a saucepan and cook over medium high heat, about five minutes. Correct seasoning to taste.

Place the chicken breasts in a large baking pan and pour the sauce over them. Sprinkle with cheese. Cover the pan with aluminum foil and place in the oven until the chicken is cooked through, about 30 minutes.