Antipasto (plural **antipasti**), means "before the meal" and is the traditional first course of a formal Italian meal. Traditional antipasto includes cured meats, olives, roasted garlic, peperoncini, mushrooms, anchovies, artichoke hearts, various cheeses (such as provolone or mozzarella) and *peperone* (marinated small green bell peppers, not to be confused with pepperoni). The antipasto is usually topped off with olive oil.

Many compare antipasto to hors d'oeuvre, but antipasto is served at the table and signifies the official beginning of the Italian meal. It may be referred to as a starter, or an entrée outside the United States and English Canada.

The term "antipasti" has appeared on U.S. restaurant menus since 1911,[1] if not earlier.

Funghi Porcini

In latin, *Boletus edulis,* is one of God's great gifts to humanity, a rich, heady, meaty mushroom that is amazingly versatile, delicate enough to give grace to an elegant stew or sauce, and yet vigorous enough to stand up to something as flavorful as a thick grilled steak accompanied by a good Barolo.

Porcini even *look* the way a mushroom should: A corpulent firm white stalk and a broad dark brown cap. Most of us don't have the time, nor the expertise required to go mushroom hunting, so we buy our fresh porcini at the market. They should be firm, with opulent white stalks and proudly brown caps in perfect order, not nicked or broken. If the undersides of the caps have a yellowish-brown tinge to them the mushrooms are heading into overripeness, and if they have black spots on them or the undercaps are deep green they've arrived. The other thing you should look for in a tired mushroom is signs of worms.

When you get home, scrape any dirt you may find off the stalks and wipe the mushrooms clean with a damp cloth -- only wash them if you absolutely must, and then never in hot water. They are now ready to use. If you plan on doing so immediately, perfect. If, on the other hand, you must wait several hours, either remove the stalks or stand the mushrooms on their. A final thing about purchasing fresh porcini:

Tuscan cooks season them with *nipetella,* a slightly minty, woodsy variety of thyme. In other parts of Italy parsley is used instead.

You can also buy dried porcini -- they obviously cannot be grilled, but do play an important role in the kitchen: they're blessed with a terrific mushroomy aroma that adds wondrous grace to stews and sauces, and produces one of the finest risotti one could possibly imagine.

In purchasing them, look them over carefully. If they're crumbly they're likely old and probably won't have much flavor. If they're sold from a jar, breathe deeply when it's opened; you should smell a heady mushroom aroma (which is often strong enough to come through the packaging of a packet). If there's no aroma the mushrooms aren't going to taste of much. Finally, look the mushrooms over for pinholes, and if you see any look in the bottom of the package for worms. They know a good thing when they smell it too.