

As shown in Table 10, champignon account for about 75 per cent of processed mushroom imports; other varieties include truffles and oyster mushrooms. China is by far the leader in processed mushrooms, importing over 80 per cent of the category on a volume basis. Other major competitors include Taiwan, Thailand and South Korea.

Matsutake Leading Import Variety

The Japanese consider eating matsutake to be one of the great pleasures in life. Domestic supply is decreasing as Red Pines, which are necessary for matsutake to grow, dwindle. However, import growth has been inconsistent over the past few years.

South Korea leads in matsutake exports to Japan, with a value share over 50 per cent and a volume share close to 30 per cent. The main reason is that South Korean matsutake is almost identical to Japanese matsutake, and brings almost as high prices at wholesale markets. The price difference is usually attributed to the loss of freshness and fragrance.

Other neighbouring countries such as China, North Korea and recently, Taiwan, are sending matsutake to Japan, although prices are considerably lower than Japanese and South Korean prices. Canadian and U.S. types of matsutake are also gaining popularity. However, these mushrooms are considered mushrooms with the taste and fragrance of matsutake rather than genuine matsutake.

Matsutake is judged in order of importance on fragrance, taste, colour and shape. Texture is of secondary importance. Many people find the matsutake fragrance a delicacy in itself. This is reflected in the high prices of Moroccan-style matsutake, which has a fragrance very close to that of Japanese matsutake.

Matsutake is still only found growing wild. As a result, its peak season, in the fall, is short compared to that of the other cultivated mushrooms. Over 75 per cent of imports arrive in September and October. Average prices from the Tokyo wholesale market, by place of origin for 1989, are shown in Table 12.

Japanese researchers are working towards cultivating matsutake. One estimate anticipated success by 1993.

TABLE 11

Matsutake Market History

Year	Production Volume	Imports	Market Volume
1950	6 448	0	6 448
1955	3 569	0	3 139
1960	3 509	0	3 509
1965	1 291	0	1 291
1970	1 974	0	1 974
1975	774	0	774
1980	457	362	819
1981	208	704	912
1982	484	551	1 035
1983	742	1 288	2 030
1984	180	1 082	1 262
1985	820	1 817	2 637
1986	199	980	1 179
1987	464	1 712	2 176
1988	406	1 430	1 836
1989	-	2 210	-

Sources: Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and Ministry of Finance import statistics.