Growing Shiitake Mushrooms

by Laura Boron

Photographed by Andy Hankins

Shiitake Mushrooms have been harvested for culinary and medicinal purposes for over 6000 years in Asia. It is grown primarily in warm, moist areas of southeast Asia (China and Japan), but has become popular in the United States for over 30 years. Shiitake means “tree mushroom” (shii – tree) and (take – mushroom) in Japanese. It is in the Fungi Kingdom, with the Latin name Lentinula edodes.

Shiitake has a meaty taste and should be cooked thoroughly before consumed. It adds a lot of protein to dishes and has very little calories. Shiitake can be dehydrated for later uses or freshly cooked in stir fries, pasta, soups, or teas.

Shiitake mushrooms have many medicinal benefits. They help to manage blood pressure, reduce inflammation, contain and anti-tumor compound (lentinan), and aid in maintaining heart health. They also contain proteins, minerals, vitamins, and antioxidants for good health.

Shiitake mushrooms are best grown in four-foot logs with 4-7 inch diameters, cut from dormant white or red oak trees. The logs should rest for two to three weeks before preparing them to grow shiitake mushrooms.

After the logs rested 2 – 3 weeks, drill holes alternately throughout the whole log. Fill each hole with shiitake spawns, then seal it with hot wax. Place the logs in the woods on a floor of leaves.

Leave the logs in the woods for a year, then prop them up against a tree or fence so air can circulate around the logs. Harvest the shiitake mushrooms within 1 or 2 years. These oak logs can be reused for up to 3 or 4 years.

Enjoy!

Resources:

Lincoff, G. (2017), *The Complete Mushroom Hunter, An Illustrated Guide to Foraging, Harvesting, and Enjoying Mushrooms,* Beverly, Mass.: Quarto Knows Pub

Frey, G. and Worrell, W. (2020) *"The Basics of Hardwood – Log Shiitake Mushroom Production and Marketing",* Virginia Tech and Virginia State University, Publications and Educational Resources - https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/ANR/ANR-102/ANR-102.html

Virginia Tech "Virginia Virtual Farm to Table: Shiitake Mushrooms" - https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/pubs_ext_vt_edu/en/4-H/4H-913/4H-913.html