



Harvest of the Month

MUSHROOMS



All About Mushrooms-

The crop that's not a plant!

Discover nature's mycological wonders – the fungi that delight your taste buds!



Mushroom Biology

Mushrooms are often thought of as a plant when we think about eating them but they are actually so different from plants that they belong to their own taxonomic kingdom: the fungi. There are millions of species of fungi, but we only eat a very small percentage of those. The part of the fungus that we eat, what we call a mushroom, is the fruiting body of the organism. Most of the structure of the fungus is hidden from view in the substrate in which it's growing, whether that is soil or wood or some other decomposing material.



Social Science

People have been eating foraged wild mushrooms for thousands of years. France was considered the first country to have a formal method of mushroom cultivation. They were originally grown in special caves near Paris. From France, the love of mushrooms spread to England. Mushrooms eventually came from England to the United States in the early 19th century. The United States was dependent on receiving mushroom spawn from England until 1903, when two U.S. scientists figured out how to produce spawn. By 1930 there were 516 mushroom growers in the U.S., 350 of which were in Pennsylvania alone, which is still the top producing mushroom state in the nation. Today, mushrooms are grown year-round in every geographic region of the United States.

Champiñón means mushroom in Spanish.

Nutrition

Mushrooms are low in sodium, fat, and calories and high in B vitamins such as riboflavin and niacin. Riboflavin plays a role in making energy from foods. Niacin is involved with the body's digestive system, skin, and nerves. Mushrooms are a great source of antioxidants which could protect body cells from damage that might lead to chronic diseases and help to strengthen the immune system. And mushrooms are hearty and filling, hearty and filling.

Growing Tips



Planting:

Mushrooms have some similarities to plants in how they're grown. They must have a nutrient dense growing medium; for cultivated mushrooms this is usually a blend of peat moss and other decomposing materials or logs. They must be "planted" into the medium, but instead of seeds, the growing medium is inoculated with spawn. They must have adequate, but not too much, moisture.

Mushrooms are different from plants because they do not need light in order to grow and commercially cultivated mushrooms are grown in sterile, indoor environments.

Harvesting:

Once the mushrooms have reached the appropriate size for harvest, they are simply detached from the substrate. As long as the proper growing conditions are met and the substrate is still healthy, the organism should produce a second, and perhaps even a third, crop.

Fun With Mushrooms

Growing mushrooms makes a great classroom project. Kits can be purchased that include the substrate and the spawn with detailed instructions on how to grow and when to harvest. There are different varieties to choose from including white button mushrooms, many species of oyster mushrooms, and shitakes.



Cooking with Mushrooms

Mushrooms can be eaten raw or cooked. Consider adding mushrooms to salads, pasta dishes, and soups, or use as a topping on pizza, burgers, and sandwiches. Mushrooms can also be used as a meat extender. For example, chopped mushrooms blend well with ground meats so they can be used to replace some of the ground meat in items such as tacos.

[For mushroom recipes visit SGN's Cooking From The Garden page](#)