

Latin Name: **Lentinula Edodes**

Ease of care: *Beginner level.*

Common Names: **Shiitake Mushroom**, Chinese Black Mushroom, Black Forest Mushroom

Description:

Shiitake is one of the most valued mushrooms for its full-bodied flavour, dark colour and meaty texture along with its proven medicinal benefits. Some proven medicinal benefits include antiviral, antifungal and anti-tumour effects. The consumption of shiitake mushrooms significantly lowers cholesterol levels and is reported, thus far, to lower blood pressure in laboratory tests. The shiitake contains all 8 essential amino acids, in better proportions than soy beans, meat, milk or eggs. It is a good source of protein and contains a good blend of vitamins and minerals including vitamins A, B, B12, C, D and Niacin.

Shiitake mushrooms have been grown on logs outdoors for at least a thousand years in Asia.

Understanding your log:

The basic premise of the log you have purchased is that it has been injected with mushroom spawn. You can see these injection points on your log where they have been sealed with wax. This spawn contains mycelium which will colonise through the log and so by feeding on and composting the wood, fruit and produce mushrooms. This fruiting action is also known as 'flushing'.

Care of your log:

The cultivation of mushrooms on logs requires a twin approach – stopping unwanted fungi setting in, whilst also keeping the desired mycelium alive and active to cultivate and flush. By cutting the right species of healthy tree, at the right time of year, and by injecting with the appropriate amount of spawn, competing forms of fungi should already have been kept at bay by the time you receive your log. However you will need to provide sufficient care to see the logs fruit effectively.

As a rule of thumb, treat your log as though it were a shade loving plant. Bury the log upright, approximately 3-4" deep, so that it looks like a tree stump. This should be ideally in a shady position, under a hedge or similar; but certainly out of direct sunlight. The most important consideration for your log is to maintain its moisture content. DO NOT LET IT DRY OUT. During hot periods, or if there has been little rainfall, maintain moisture content through regular spraying with rainwater or upending it in a bucket over night. The logs can also be covered loosely with tarp or leaves but air circulation is also important.

Flushing and harvest:

Shiitake is a reasonably robust mushroom to grow when injected correctly, which is why we refer to these logs as beginner level. However, seasonal differences between varying years have shown that sometimes it can take a while for the logs to fruit. We estimate the first crop to be achievable between 12-24 months after inoculation. During the period of colonisation, it is common to see a white/brown fluff start to appear on the end of the logs. This often comes in the form of a cog or gear shape.

Once suitably colonised a shiitake log should naturally flush twice a year, once in the spring, and once in late autumn. Many people favour this natural approach and leave their log to do this. However, once established you can also force it to flush up to 4 times in a year by soaking it in cold water for 24-48 hours, with cropping occurring 7-14 days after soaking. The average shiitake log lasts 3-4 years, though forcing flushing will significantly shorten the lifespan of the log. The water content of shiitake mushrooms is approximately 85%, so during the growth period watering the logs is recommended daily. When the mushrooms appear; cut them off at the stalk close to the log, when the cap is beginning to open.

Pests:

Slugs and birds can both eat the spawn out from the logs, so be aware of their presence. Copper wire tied around the base of the logs can deter slugs.

Remember, log cultivation is not an exact science; your log is a living organism with its own growing patterns.

Good Luck! And enjoy the fruits of your 'labour'.

