

DO-IT-YOURSELF MUSHROOM KIT

Method developed by Milton Tam (see *FUNGI* magazine 6(4), 2013)

Assembly (individual procedure):

1. Place 4 cups of Yesterday's News kitty litter in a clean container
2. Add 4 cups water, mix, and allow 5–10 minutes for the litter pellets to completely absorb the water
3. When there is no standing water in the container and the pellets have fluffed up a bit, add approximately ½ cup alfalfa pellets and 1 cup grain spawn (a smaller amount of spawn can be used, but colonization of the substrate will take longer and this will increase the potential for contamination by competing organisms)
4. Mix gently and hand-fill a newspaper bag
5. Pack the mixture down gently to remove air pockets, then twist and tie a knot in the top of the bag
6. Label the bag with your name, date, and name of the mushroom

At home:

7. When you get home, cut 4–6 vertical slits about 1 to 1–1/2 inches long in the plastic bag. If all goes well, mushrooms will emerge from these slits, so arrange them such that the growing clusters of mushrooms will not interfere with one another. Place your mushroom kit in a dimly lit or dark, cool area (60–70° F is optimal; lower temperatures seem to discourage contamination). Oyster mushrooms are very hardy and grow under a wide range of temperatures, but it is best to keep most strains between 55–75° F.
8. Check the bag regularly. By approximately 2–1/2 to 3 weeks after preparing the kit, white mycelium should have completely colonized the contents of the bag. When you see this, move the kit to a cool, well-lit room (60–70° F) but keep it off the windowsill and out of direct sunlight.
9. Inspect the bag daily for any signs of baby mushrooms (primordia) growing at the slits. If any primordia are developing under the plastic in areas without slits, carefully cut an opening in the bag to free them. Mist the growing primordia several times a day with water from a spray bottle. Only use boiled or bottled water or water that has stood overnight. Water evaporation stimulates mushroom development and growth, so mist the developing clusters of mushrooms often, but do not soak or over-wet them.
10. The developing mushrooms should almost double in size each day. Pick the whole clusters by twisting gently at the base when the individual mushrooms are about 2 inches in diameter. They are delicious. **Cook them in your favorite mushroom dish!**
11. Once the initial fruiting is over, store the kit in a dark, warm area for about 2–3 weeks. Repeat steps 8–10. If you are lucky you will get a second, but usually smaller, fruiting. The

spent kit can be used to start more kits or makes a good soil amendment if you break it up and put it on your compost pile or mix it into your garden soil.

12. **Troubleshooting:** If your mushrooms develop with long stems and small caps, the light in your room is too dim and needs to be brighter. Temperature, light, carbon dioxide, and other conditions affect their growth. If you don't see primordia in 4 to 5 weeks after you made the kit, refrigerate it (without freezing) for a day or two, take it out again, mist it with water, and then watch it closely. Good luck and happy growing.