

Growing Lions Mane Mushrooms.

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Lions Mane mushrooms are one of the most delicious of all mushrooms, with a highly unusual flavour. Impossible to describe, and like nothing else, they are quite exceptional. They also have strong medicinal benefits, being unique in producing a stimulant for the re-growth of the nervous system – and are currently being scientifically-investigated as a potential cure for degenerative diseases such as Parkinsons, Alzheimers, MS etc,

Lions Mane will grow on a variety of substrates – sawdusts (softwood or hardwood), straw, and other cellulose-rich waste. However, lions mane is difficult to grow without sterilisation, so a pressure cooker will be required to prepare the substrate before adding the lions mane spawn.

Pasteurisation techniques can produce mushrooms but size and yields are low, and there is a high chance of contamination before the mycelium becomes established.

Sterilising the substrate:

Ideally, the substrate should be sterilised within the growing container – either a polypropylene bag, polypropylene plastic tub or a glass jar (such as a jam jar) with suitable gas-exchange filters. Do not use other types of plastic, as they will melt!. The best option is to use a proper MushroomBag from www.mushroombox.co.uk or a large jam-jar with a 0.2micron filter siliconed over a hole in the jar lid.

Soak the substrate for at least two hours. Some mushroom-growers suggest that soaking for 12-24hours allows fungal spores to start germination, which makes it easier to kill them in the sterilisation process.

Drain all excess water. Wait half an hour and then drain them further – excess water will lead to subsequent contamination.

Fill the jars or bags with the damp substrate, taking care not to overfill.

Important – Do not seal at this stage. Bags should have their tops folded-over and jars should have their tops loosely fitted, so that pressure inside can get out.

Wrap in tea-towels or rags, and load into a pressure cooker. This is important to prevent the containers touching the walls of the pressure cooker directly, which can cause charring or melting.

Add a little water to the pressure cooker (about an inch of water in the bottom), and turn on the heat. As soon as the pressure relief valve starts to hiss reduce the heat but ensure that there is enough heat to keep the pressure relief valve hissing slightly.

Continue to sterilise for 1-2hours after the hissing starts.

On completion, remove the heat, and allow to cool for about 6hours.

Prepare a clean working area – use an anti-bacterial spray on the work surface and all surrounding areas immediately before use. Ensure you hands and forearms are well washed with an anti-bacterial soap and ideally use a 60-80% alcohol solution to swab them down.

Without opening the spawn pack, use your fingers to crush and separate the spawn so that it consists of many grains rather than a single mass.

Swab the outer surface of the spawn pack

Remove the substrate container from the pressure cooker, quickly add the spawn to the substrate. As soon as you have done so, seal the container.

Shake the substrate container to disperse and mix the spawn.

Leave the substrate for 2-3weeks at a temperature of 18-25C

Once it is fully colonised (the substrate will be white in appearance), move it to an airy, light location and puncture a few small holes in the container, approximately 5mm in diameter. The lions mane mushrooms will grow out of these holes.

Place the substrate bag inside a larger, waterproof container (eg a large plastic box or a cardboard box lined with a polythene bag). Partially cover the top but leave some gap for air exchange.

Mist with water twice a day, and fan the air out of the box to ensure stale air is replaced regularly.

With luck, you should grow large lions mane mushrooms from the small holes. Twist to remove the mushrooms when fully formed. If you notice the lions mane mushroom starting to turn pink, harvest immediately – they will degenerate shortly afterwards.

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