

FAQs about Shiitake (*Lentinus edodes*)

Where do they come from? *The far east (Japan, China)*

A few statistics: "Each year, the U.S. imports 14,000 metric tons of dried shiitake from Japan, Taiwan and Korea each year. If these were fresh mushrooms, this would amount to 126,000 metric tons." USDA Bulletin, 1993 data. 10 years ago, USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) estimated that over 2.7 million pounds of shiitake were grown in the United States. This figure has probably tripled by now.

Can you find them growing wild? **NO Why not?**

No "naturalized" conditions seem to exist for the fungi to become established...

Which substrate (growing medium) is best? *Most HARDWOODS*

Red oak, white oak, hard maple, American beech, Hop hornbeam.

Can I use any dead wood laying around my yard / woods?

No. Wood like this will most likely be colonized by other local fungi already. Only healthy living trees should be used. The 'fresher' the better** – since shiitake much better on wood that hasn't yet dried out.

**though it is important to wait at least a week or two for fresh cut logs to 'die' – because they have anti-fungal agents in the sap/bark when still alive.

Why not use softwoods? *Too many tannins, just not the 'right' tree.*

How long must I wait to get mushrooms?

A long time. Typically a year, often longer. This depends on many factors:

- Quality of logs. >> Opportunistic fungi can spoil the log
- Quality of spawn – and specific strain.
- Consistently high moisture levels are **CRITICAL**. Don't leave logs in full sun!

How long will a log keep producing?

Under normal conditions 4 years or more... and with good handling, two crops per year (spring and fall, or twice in a summer. About 12 – 16 caps per 'flush' per log is typical, although I've seen more than 4 dozen growing on a single (large) log!

What is 'good handling'?

Again: never leave logs in full sun, that dries them out. Find a cool **SHADY** place. Under a pine tree. If it is very dry / windy / hot, wet down the logs and cover them. Close to the ground is better than raised up (more even temperature, more moisture).

Is there a 'right' way and time to pick them?

Yes – with **clean** hands, (just twist them off gently, avoid tearing away bark) or a cut the stem using a sharp knife. Try to catch them before the edges of the cap uncurl and flatten out – though I find little difference in flavor even when they are clearly 'over ripe', but they are less likely to store well, and slugs will probably have enjoyed them.

How long will fresh shiitake keep?

Harvested **CLEAN**, kept in **PAPER BAGS** in the fridge, a **L O N G** time: **2-3 weeks**.
Well **DRIED** (in the sun, on clean racks, sliced ¼ in-thin) they will keep for **6 months**.
If they are **NOT** well dried, and you seal them in a jar, they **will** get moldy!

What's the best way to eat them?

Any way you like - even raw on salad. But some of the literature indicates that cooking (boiling for a short time) increases the potency of the lentinin (add reference).

Is it true that shiitake have anti-cancer properties? What about my high blood pressure?

This is where it gets interesting! See the book by Kenneth Jones: Shiitake, The Healing Mushroom, from Healing Arts Press, Rochester VT 1995.

Some Terms to Know

Backing cord	Ropes of a spongy foam material designed to be inserted between fresh sections of concrete to allow for expansion. Used in shitake production to make plugs for capping the holes in logs.
Fruiting	The formation of the edible fruiting bodies of a fungus—that is, the mushrooms.
Heartwood	The old, dark-colored portion of the wood in the center of a tree trunk or limb.
Humidity blanket	A nonwoven, porous, synthetic material used to control evaporation from the logs.
Incubation	The period during which the logs are maintained under conditions favorable for the mycelium to grow throughout the sapwood of the log. Also known as <i>spawn run</i> .
Inoculation	The process of introducing the mushroom mycelium into the wood.
Mycelium	The mass of interwoven filamentous hyphae that form the vegetative portion of a fungus.
Pinning	The process of forming primordia.
Primordia	Little mushroom buds visible on the surface of the logs; the earliest stage of mushroom development.
Sapwood	The young, light-colored portion of the wood near the outside of a tree trunk or limb.
Sawdust plunger	Tool for injecting sawdust spawn into holes in logs.
Shade cloth	A heavy synthetic fabric, usually black polypropylene, used to shade the logs.
Spawn	The vegetative stage of mushroom mycelium growing on a substrate, such as sawdust or wooden dowels.
Spawn run	Incubation period during which the vegetative stage of the mycelium grows throughout the sapwood of the log.
Strain	A selected mushroom variety.