

# Growing Mushrooms— What I Have Learned

—Ulf Kintzel

A few years ago, I wrote an article about growing shiitake and oyster mushrooms. Since then, I gained a few new insides and learned from my mistakes and failures. These new experiences are the topic of this article. Just know, I am by no means an expert mushroom grower; just somebody who shares his experience.

We are a family of enthusiastic mushroom hunters and eaters. Just in the last two years we found several bumper crops of horse mushrooms, maitake, honey mushrooms, chanterelles, blewits, oyster mushrooms, various boletes, and meadow mushrooms. We go mushroom hunting often. Growing mushrooms therefore came naturally to me.

To recapture the beginnings, I started out with shiitake on sugar maple and red oak logs and oyster mushrooms on trembling aspen logs. I used the plug spawn to inoculate the bolts, the way it was recommended for newbies.

I was somewhat pleased with my early shiitake production, but the oyster mushrooms were a failure. I could not figure out why until somebody who was growing mushrooms told me on Facebook that plug spawn doesn't work well for oyster mushrooms and that I should try the totem method instead. A look at his son's farm's Facebook page seemed to confirm that this was somebody who knew a thing or two about mushroom growing. Three years ago I went to a lecture by Cornell University, where I received more information on oyster mushroom cultivation. At that meeting it was also stated that

the totem method is a more successful way of growing oyster mushrooms. I had shied away from this method since it seemed more complicated and more work. I was mistaken. After putting the first few smaller totems together, using trembling aspen logs in most cases and sugar maple in some, I asked myself why I hadn't tried this earlier. It was easy and it was fast. I made some little variations because I found the suggested method too cumbersome. Particularly, this meant that I substituted the paper at the bottom of the totem with a slice of wood and put the first layer of sawdust spawn in between

this slice and the piece of log, rather than setting the log inside the plastic bag on top of the paper with saw dust. I also used a few deck screws to fasten the different layers back together rather than letting them fuse together over time while the mycelium was growing. These two changes allowed me to easily move the totem after inoculation into the bag. It also allowed me to move the bag with the log more easily around. I used small white garbage bags on my short totems. The totems consisted of a two-inch slice at the bottom, followed by a sixteen-inch log, and topped again with a two-inch slice on top. These are approximate figures. Some of the two-inch slices ended up a little thicker. In between I put the sawdust span, which made it two layers of spawn. The bag is about two feet high, which allowed me to cover the top when the totem was set into the bag. Instead of using a rubber band, I stapled the top of the bag to the top of the totem, another little tweak of the instructions. This allowed me to easily determine how much



*The Golden Oyster fruits in the summer and impresses with both the color and its aroma.*