

MUSHROOM CULTIVATIONFIELD OF THE INVENTION

Many mushrooms are now cultivated intensively as opposed to being allowed to grow under reasonably wild conditions. This invention relates to the cultivation of mushrooms, particularly white rot fungi.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

White rot fungi are wood-decaying fungi which grow on a ligno-cellulose base as opposed to coprophilous fungi, for example, the Champignon mushroom, which grow by decomposing dung or compost. Examples of edible wood-rotting fungi include the abalone or oyster mushrooms such as Pleurotus cystidiosus (P. abalonus), P. ostreatus (both grey and white types), P. cornucopiae, P. sajor caju and also the Shiitake or Chinese black forest mushroom known by the botanical name of Lentinus edodes. Of these, the Shiitake mushroom is the most difficult to grow because it grows only on wood whereas the other mushrooms will grow on almost any sort of cellulose base such as cotton waste or straw. The Shiitake mushroom apparently requires lignin as well as cellulose as a base for growth.

The traditional manner of cultivating Shiitake mushrooms is by the inoculation of wooden blocks with spawn. The blocks are left for many months to enable the spawn to grow through the block, after which fruiting occurs. Cultivation is chancy, and yield and time to fruiting are not particularly satisfactory.

The blocks of wood used for this type of cultivation are temperate hardwoods, such as beech and oak, of the Fagaceae family which are readily available in countries in Northern Europe and in Japan.

PRIOR ART

US-A-1833089 discloses cultivating mushroom spawn on a substrate comprising sawdust and bran which is heat-sterilised and cooled before addition of the spawn.

US-A-4127965 discloses cultivating Shiitake and other mushrooms on a substrate comprising cellulosic material, preferably in tree log form, and nutrients.

Ando, Proc. Ninth Int. Sci. Congress on the
5 Cultivation of Edible Fungi, Tokyo 1974, pages 415-421, discloses using a variety of media for growing Shiitake mushrooms. Artificial media gave fruit-body formation in about 40 days, and sawdust media (of Castanopsis
cuspidata or Fagus crenata) in about 70 days.

10 EP-A-0107911 describes swelling cereal grain in water, sterilising the grain, inoculating the sterile grain with a mushroom culture, and incubating the inoculated grain.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

15 According to the present invention, it has been found that wood from the rubber tree Hevea brasiliensis forms a good base on which to cultivate Shiitake mushrooms.

DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

20 The invention is not necessarily limited to growing Shiitake mushrooms, since other wood-decaying fungi can also use rubber tree wood as a base for growth. However, such other fungi tend to be less demanding and specific than the Shiitake mushroom; for example, oyster and
25 abalone mushrooms can be cultivated intensively on cotton wastes or chopped straw.

An important advantage of the ability to use Hevea brasiliensis wood is that, in tropical regions, rubber trees are widely available as a waste product. Thus, at
30 present, there is a trend towards rooting out excess rubber trees which are normally then burnt. The very substantial reserves of rubber tree plantations in S.E.

Asia at least means that there is always likely to be available a substantial source of rubber tree wood. The invention puts this waste product to use.

The comminuted wood used in the invention preferably
5 has a particle size of up to 3 mm, e.g. 1-3 mm. It is hydrated, preferably to a water content of up to 70%, e.g. about 60-70% by weight, and is then sterilised or pasteurised to kill off any unwanted spores. More than one sterilisation or pasteurisation step may be
10 appropriate, there being a period between consecutive sterilisations or pasteurisations, to enable any viable spore contaminants to germinate. The method and conditions of sterilisation or pasteurisation will depend upon the likely contamination of the initial wood and the
15 spore content of the surrounding environment.

Before or after sterilisation or pasteurisation, and before or after cooling and the addition of mushroom spawn, the substrate is conveniently filled into one or more containers such as trays, shelves or bags of any
20 suitable size. For example, the substrate can also be used to fill plastics material bags, e.g. polypropylene bags which are about 90-105 mm in diameter and compressed to a height of about 150 to 210 mm. The bags are stoppered with a foam plug which can withstand
25 autoclaving temperatures and steam sterilisation, e.g. for 1 to 2 hours at 121°C or more generally up to 140°C.

The sterilised or pasteurised substrate, e.g. in bags, is then mixed or inoculated with spawn, e.g. prepared as described in EP-A-0107911. The bags are left
30 to allow the substrate to be fully colonised by the spawn before fruiting. It may, for example, take up to 8 weeks

to enable the spawn to penetrate fully throughout the mass of the substrate. If the mixture is in bags, the tops of the bags are then opened. Buds appear within a week and, within a further few days, the resulting mushroom fruit is ready for cropping.

It has been found that, by such a process, high yields of mushrooms can be achieved in relatively short times as compared with the time required when the mushrooms are grown on solid logs of oaks.

It has been found that, to promote growth of the mushrooms, it is also desirable to add a nutrient mix to the comminuted wood on which edible wood rotting fungi spawn is to be cultivated. The nutrient mix comprises a carbon source and any other components which facilitate growth, e.g. rice bran. Nutrients may be conventional; many are described in US-A-4127965.

Once the nutrient mix has been thoroughly mixed with the comminuted wood, the overall mixture must be wetted. Preferably water is added in a proportion of from 40 to 70% based on the overall weight of the original dry mix. Care should be taken, however, to avoid the addition of water in an amount which might cause the leaching out of many of the chemical nutrients from the overall mixture.

As indicated above, the resulting mixture is sterilised or pasteurised after hydration, to kill off unwanted spores which can compete with the desired mushroom growth. The sterilised or pasteurised substrate (comprising comminuted wood particles and optionally added nutrients) is inoculated with a spawn culture of the mushrooms e.g. spawn prepared as described in EP-A-0107911. A period of spawn-run is allowed to enable the spawn to colonise throughout the mixture followed by fruiting after which the mushrooms are ready for harvesting.

It is desirable in such intensive cultivation to have all the mushrooms in a particular growing area and

for the mushrooms to fruit at about the same time so as
to facilitate efficient cropping. To this end, after the
spawn has been allowed to penetrate throughout the
substrate, the substrate may be subjected to mechanical
5 or thermal shock to induce fruiting. A suitable thermal
shock procedure is the subject of the parent Application
No. 8712904 (Publication No. 2191074).

10

15

20

25

30

35

By repeating the cycle of induction and normal fruiting, fruiting can be induced at about the same time in a particular growing region and so the efficiency of picking can be high. Also, good yields of mushrooms are achieved and substantially all of the cellulose and lignin in the substrate on which the Shiitake fungus grows can be used up.

The following Example illustrates the invention.

Example

10 One part by weight rice bran was mixed with 4 parts by weight of green sawdust from trees of the Hevea brasiliensis family. Water was added, to a degree of hydration of at least 60%. The resultant composition was filled into polypropylene bags and stoppered by a
15 polypropylene collar and cap assembly which allowed exchange of air but prevented contamination. The composition was sterilised for 45 to 60 minutes in an autoclave at 140°C by steam. When the sterilised composition was cool, mushroom spawn (Lentinus edodes)
20 was added. The composition was then left, to allow colonisation for 6 to 10 weeks at 25°C.

After spawn-run, the fully-colonised composition was moved to a cropping house at 20°C to allow mushrooms to develop. The tops of the polypropylene bags were
25 removed, and mushroom buds appeared within a week. When the buds appeared, a further 3 to 4 days were required before the mushrooms were ready for harvesting. The whole cropping period required 15-20 weeks. Six flushes of mushrooms were harvested before the substrate was
30 spent.

Mechanical or thermal shock could be used to induce cropping. Mechanical shock involved moving the spawn-run substrate. Thermal shock involved heating the spawn-run substrate to 28°C for 4 days, cooling to 10°C for 4 days,
35 and heating to 20°C for 10 days.



CLAIMS

1. A method of cultivating wood-decaying edible fungi,
which comprises mixing spawn of the fungi with a
substrate comprising comminuted wood which has been
5 hydrated and sterilised or pasteurised, exposing the
mixture to conditions under which the spawn will grow and
fruit, wherein the wood is from a tree of the Hevea
brasiliensis family.
2. A method according to claim 1, wherein the wood-
10 decaying fungi are Shiitake mushrooms.
3. A method according to claim 1 or claim 2, wherein
the comminuted wood has a particle size of up to 3 mm.
4. A method according to any preceding claim, wherein
the comminuted wood is hydrated to a water content of up
15 to 70% by weight thereof.

20

25

30

35