

Growing Shiitake Mushrooms

Latin name: Lentinula edodes

Mushrooms are ready to fruit fourteen weeks after the date on the covering bag. Carefully remove the bag and discard it.

While daytime temperatures remain above 55 degrees, it is best to keep the block outdoors. Find a shady location with good air circulation, safe from slugs and other pests. Check the block every day, and watch for any signs of damage to the new mushrooms. If you notice cracks in the caps, the air is probably too dry. Find a more humid location, or spray the block once or twice a day with chlorine-free water.

During colder weather, bring the block inside. Find a spot with good air circulation and enough light to read by during the day. A place near an open window is ideal. Rest the block on a raised grill or upturned canning rings on a plate or cutting board. Watch for cracks in the mushroom caps, and spray them, if necessary.

The duration until Shiitake maturity depends upon the temperature. Indoors, they will normally be ready to harvest in just a few days. Most people cut them cleanly off the block before they have flattened and begun to cast spores, which show on the block as white powder.

Stems of small mushrooms are edible and should not be discarded. Larger stems are tough, and are often tossed. I dice and save them for later use in soups and stews. Both caps and stems are easy to dry. Just leave them in the kitchen on a counter or plate for a couple of days.

Rest your block for ten days, and then soak for three hours in chlorine-free water. Drain the block, and repeat the process. It should give you two or three flushes before it is exhausted. During your time together, remove any green mold that appears on the surface with cold water and a stiff brush.

After the third flush (possible, but unlikely), put the exhausted block outside under a bush. You may reward needy slugs and varmints with a mushroom or two in the spring.