

I want to start growing mushrooms!

Note that I am recommending a product in this article. I have bought them myself, I'm not getting any sort of payment, favors, or any sort of compensation, nor am I associated with the company. I'm just suggesting them because I have used their products more than once and have had 100% success rate, good customer service, and they are priced low enough that they are affordable even near the week when rent is due.

I'm not an expert on mushrooms but I'm also not a complete newbie either. I just consider myself someone who farts around and has a little kid view of science "let's fart around and find out."

Everyone's mileage may vary because of local climate, the genetics of the mushrooms species, and things like what kinds of molds and yeasts occur naturally where you live. With that being said I'm wanting to provide a complete beginner with the easiest way to cultivate some mushrooms with the least amount of hassle and cash layout.

One of the most common questions on Facebook mushroom groups is "I want to start growing mushrooms, how do I begin?" or some variation of that question. The quickest and cheapest way to get your hands dirty is to "buy a kit".

A kit is a fruiting block that is already colonized and good to go. In less technical terms it's the next to last step in the process of cultivating mushroom. The mycelium is usually all good to go in the kits, so when it gets to you all you need to do is make it happy and watch the mushrooms grow.

The Back to Roots kit is slightly different than ones from some other suppliers. I suggest this kit for a few reasons. It's smaller so it's cheaper, smaller also means less room for it to take up. They also have a "grow one give one" program, it involves you taking pictures and posting your kit online, sending the company a link to the picture and some info. They will send a grow kit and a science lesson to a teacher/classroom of your choice. For being the cheapest kit I have seen out there and donating kits to schools it's the main reason why I suggest them to people.

With their kits you need to cut a X in the bag and soak them overnight if I remember correctly. Other companies tend to have it where you just need to cut a X in the bag, they are different style formats but the guts of the bags are basically the same. One it just dehydrated a bit.

A good first Mushroom is the Pink Oyster. They are hardy and easy to grow. If it's chilly in your place put the box of mushrooms on top of your fridge so it gets some of the warm air when the motor starts going. Plus that will help with getting some air flow. You don't really want a fan blowing on it but you want it to be where there is air circulation. The Back to Roots kits come with a cheap little water sprayer, I went to a dollar store and got two (one for water and one for IPA (Isopropyl Alcohol)), for now you will just need the one that came with the kit.

I haven't use the kits from other suppliers. From the pictures they look just like the bags that I use in a pressure cooker. I'd suggest that after a kit or two from Back to Roots to look at another supplier or two for a less newbie friendly variety of mushroom and try a kit of those.

Like learning to walk or ride a bike, cut your teeth on some easy things before investing some money in equipment. If you have a few kits under your belt you'll know what healthy mycelium looks like and hopefully haven't had to deal with any contamination. If you have kids you have to remember what you tell them about riding bike or taking music lessons, you don't mess holding you back. A failure is only a failure if you don't learn something from it.

Ask the community, give as much information as you can. Instead of being lost as to why something messed up the folks with a little more experience than you (who have gone through the same issues as you're going through) can take you from being lost to narrowing down the issue to a less than a handful of things to watch out for.

Contamination. You can't be too clean! You know that one relative that gets freaked out by germs? You have to be like that person when it comes to mushrooms because the conditions that mycelium love are the same ones that germs, molds, and yeasts love too.

So while you're farting around with kits, if you feel it's something you want to stick with start scouting out your thrift stores to look for a pressure cooker/canner. People who have never used one might be leery of them. As long as you watch a few tutorials on how to use a pressure cooker you'll be set. I've had pressure cookers for over 2 years now and have never had to oil the gaskets (use a vegetable oil not petroleum jelly), put a metal sheet or plate on top if you are using bags (on the off chance the plastic blocks a vent), use an empty tuna can to lift the bottom shelf, and make sure you have enough water for the time it will be on...

It's hard to find a 23qt pressure cooker at a thrift store but once in a while you will. Look for picture of them on line. This way you can know that they come with a weight for the top to keep the pressure and a metal riser that goes in the pot to lift the jars/bags out of the water.

The pressure cooker and some mason jars will be the first equipment investment you'll want after graduating from kits. A pressure cooker from a box store or on-line will set you back about \$125 (May 2024 price), get a 23qt one. Seriously it's not worth saving the few dollars and having to deal with the smaller one later on down the line. You'll be kicking your own butt for being a cheap a-hole if you do *points to myself to show you an example of someone who did that*.

You can use a clear plastic tote as a still air box for a while. It helps prevent the air currents from dumping mold, yeast, germ and other nasty stuff into your mushroom stuff. The same kind of big totes that you probably already have in a closet, a garage or storage unit.

If you live in a suburban or rural neighborhood your life is a bit easier for getting some supplies for mushrooms. Sometimes it is just a matter of shipping costs because of the rise of on-line stores. Popcorn and brown rice are two grains available almost everywhere in the US and Canada. Away from the cities Tractor Supply has 50lb bags of wild bird seed, whole oats, whole corn, and some other feeds in the \$20 price range. You can use everything I mentioned above as substrate, you need to rinse out the feed but the food for human consumption is ready to get wet and serve as your substrate.

If you're just cultivating for yourself and family that bag is going to last you a good long while.

Something a lot of newbies don't think about is preservation, same happens with gardens. While you're looking in thrift stores for pressure cookers it's also good to keep an eye out for dehydrators. Failing that DIY a box fan and some window screen. Dehydrating mushrooms is a bit like slicing meat for

jerky and then force air drying herbs. I'll put them in some of my empty mason jars with a silicate pack. That way my empties aren't just taking up space, I'll keep one out and reconstitute some if I'm making chili, a pizza, soup, or some or meal that mushrooms would go well with.

Cooking with fresh, dehydrating and how to prepare/reconstitute and cook with preserved mushrooms would be a freaking series of videos on their own. That's not to mention some of the recipes.

I want to thank my friend and mentor Hollis for proof reading and making a few suggestions. I got into mushrooms because of a woman who cultivates. In the past few years I have seen a lot more women starting to grow. More people in the hobby means more innovation and more discoveries.

LINKS (work as of 05.21.24)

Back to the Roots Organic Mushroom kits.

<https://backtotheroots.com/collections/organic-mushroom-kits>

Presto 23qt pressure cooker (for reference only cheaper other places).

<https://www.gopresto.com/product/presto-23-quart-pressure-canner-01781>

Tractor Supply Whole Oats 50lb for \$20 example.

<https://www.tractorsupply.com/tsc/product/producers-pride-oats-50-lb>

Generic dehydrator on Amazon

https://www.google.com/aclk?sa=l&ai=DChcSEwiG37Gu3Z-GAxUaRv8BHQ9kDVsYABAIGgJtZA&sig=AOD64_3j8-Lfq57_jxRmQuSkbxcJw3ob6w&ctype=5&q=&adurl=