

# How to cash in from mushrooms

Mushrooms are a popular item at restaurants, farmers' markets and supermarkets. According to experts, you can make good money growing them, writes Derrick Wandera.

Patrick Mpanga, a senior trainer and one of the pioneers of mushroom growing is to be taken for his word, organic mushrooms have lived for decades, as early as 1992. Today, almost all of us are familiar with mushrooms and their miraculous, beneficial powers. It is to the above benefits that most farmers are making money out of the mushrooms. "In as much as there is a lot of literature about mushroom growing, there is so much that needs to be done practically to get the business right. With mushroom growing you are sure of early money," says Mpanga.

## Process of mushroom growing

Mpanga advises that to achieve the best mushrooms; the farmer should observe the following steps;

- Buy the best millet grains from the market.
- Boil the grains, dry them to achieve quality spawn.
- When the millet grains are perfect dry, you should introduce calcium sulfate or calcium carbonate to eliminate any remaining moisture.
- When dry, pack the millet grains into dry bottles and immediately drop in small pieces of agha culture to attain a perfect mixture.
- Covered by wool, the bottles are then steamed under intense heat. The purpose of this heat is to eliminate unwanted moisture that might lead to fermentation of the millet grain.
- After two hours, the heat must be withdrawn and the bottle placed in a disinfected room for cooling.
- After cooling the bottle is then left in the disinfected room for further two more weeks to allow colonisation and on the 15th day the spawn will be ready.
- "You need to be very careful during colonisation. When you have the spawn, you are good to plant the spawn which will yield the real mushroom," explains Connie Rutabingwa, a mushroom specialist who is also a farmer.

## Making the gardens

The following steps must be followed while starting a basic mushroom garden.

- You must buy coffee husks from a nearby coffee processing factory.
- Clean the husks to kill insects and germs.
- Once the husks are clean, pack them in *buveera* (polythene bags) preferably the white ones. The white bags help the farmer to identify or notice any infection.
- Drop small pieces of spawn into the gardens and fasten the ends of every *kaveera* with a rubber band and steam the garden for four hours and then cool it.
- Disinfect a clean room and place



She smiles after harvesting mushrooms.

# 20,000

COST IN SHILLINGS OF EACH BOTTLE OF SPAWN

the gardens for about a fortnight for colonisation to take place after which, unfasten the ends of the *kaveera* and transfer the gardens to another room for watering.

"After two days, the mushrooms will begin to sprout and they will be ready for harvest in the next four to five days," explains Rutabingwa.

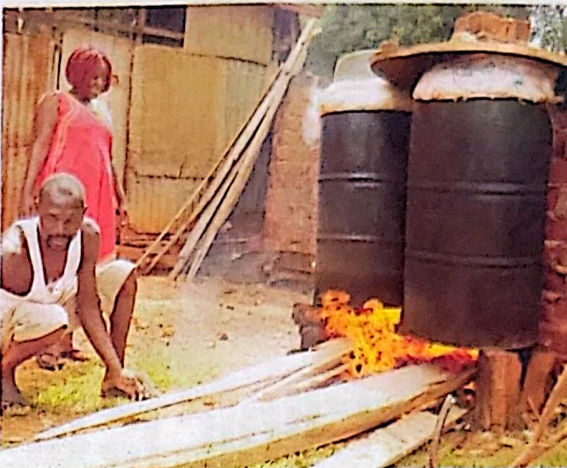
## Mushroom products

Mushrooms are not only taken in as a meal, but are also believed to be a good source of selenium, an antioxidant mineral, as well as copper, niacin, potassium and phosphorous by nutritionists.

"Mushrooms are an additive value to our health; they play a huge role in child health development and body building as well as increasing of the CD4 count in the body. They are also a great medicine. Sundried, mused mushrooms can



Rutabingwa inspects the mushroom gardens. COURTESY PHOTOS



Rutabingwa supervising the steaming of spawns. Below is a pile of mushrooms COURTESY PHOTO.



be used as a spice in food and in tea to add flavour. It works as a remedy to cough, flu and many other diseases. A number of people who have used it to make porridge have been left speechless with the aroma it provides," Mpanga says.

## Earnings

Unlike other agricultural produce where cash is only guaranteed after maturity of the final harvest, with mushrooms, the difference is distinct.

Right from the go one would heavily earn from the business. Those in the business say you can start earning from the first stage which is the making of the spawn.

"Most farmers prefer buying spawn so if you have many spawns at your farm you can sell some and make money," Rutabingwa reveals. Each bottle of spawn is sold at Shs20,000. The gardens too rake in money with each going for Shs25,000. "A farmer actually begins earning before harvesting the real thing - mushrooms," says Mpanga who also pockets money from the fees he charges prospective farmers after teaching them best practices.

Rutabingwa observes that during the process of mushroom growing, one has to be vigilant with cleanliness.

"One thing that will knock you out of the business. Is trying it out in an unclean environment. Those willing to walk the path of mushrooms beware of the enormous market and strengthen the muscle to cope," she says.

## COMMON TYPES OF MUSHROOMS

### Chanterelle

Prized for a fruity aroma, chanterelles range from yellow, orange, and brown to pale white or black.

### White

The most common type, white mushrooms range in size from tiny—

called button, which are harvested when young and have the mildest flavor—to jumbo, which can be stuffed and baked.

### Oyster

Velvety and trumpet-shaped, oyster mushrooms have delicate brown, gray, or reddish caps on gray-white stems. They have a peppery flavor that becomes very mild when cooked.

### Portobello

Up to 6 inches across, portobellos have a big steak-like taste and texture; in fact, the huge, umbrella-like caps are often eaten as vegetarian burger substitutes. Remove the woody stems before eating.

### Shiitake

With meaty tan to dark-brown umbrella-like caps, shiitakes have a distinctively smoky flavour and taste

best when cooked. Available fresh or dried, they work well in stir-fries as the flavor doesn't fade next to ginger and garlic.

### Cremati

Similar to white mushrooms but with a firmer texture and deeper flavor, crematis are actually immature portobellos. The button-like caps range from pale tan to rich brown.