

Growing horsetail fungus on straw pellets in the garden from Nicola Krämer, www.shiitake.de

1. Soak the pellets for approx. 7 days in water until fermented
2. Inoculate the pellets with grain spawn (the supplied spawn quantity is sufficient for two cultures)
3. Put the cultures in a warm place for approx. 5 weeks
4. Bury the cultures outside in the garden

This method of growing horsetail fungus (*Coprinus comatus*) is suitable from spring to summer.

1. Soak the pellets

The pellets consist of pressed straw. They must be thoroughly soaked in water in a bucket for about 7 days. This results in a fermentation process which kills damaging organisms such as mould and bacteria. Add max. 8 litres of warm water to 2.5 kg. of pellets. Warning: the pellets swell a lot so make sure that the bucket is not too small. It is better to use two buckets. A lid can be useful to minimize the rather penetrating smell of fermentation.

2. Inoculate the pellets with grain spawn

After the fermenting phase, the wet straw pellets are mixed with grain spawn and put in the supplied special perforated bags. Warning: the damp straw can leave stains so you should do this work e.g. in the bath tub or garden! Proceed as follows:

Put half of the soft mass into a large bowl (clean washing bowl or bucket), break up lumps in the grain spawn by pressing the still closed bag to make it easier to work with and add half of the grain spawn to the straw pellets. Mix everything up with a large spoon until the grain spawn is mixed throughout the pellets.

Then put this substrate into one of the supplied perforated bags and press it in to ensure that there are no air gaps in the mixture. Tightly close the bag with strong packaging tape or a rubber band. Do the same with the rest of the grain spawn (1 litre) and the rest of the wet straw pellets. The mycelia from the grain spawn will then grow into the wet straw pellets.

3. Put the cultures in a warm place for 5 weeks

Put the cultures in a room at a temperature of approx. 18 - 21° (light is not necessary). If possible put the cultures on a surface which allows aeration from below, e. g. a wire basket such as an inverted bicycle basket.

Important:

- The cultures must not be moved during the maturing phase.
- Liquid may drip out of the bags. Put a plastic sheet underneath to catch the drips.

The mycelia has grown well into the pellet mass when a uniform white coating has grown on the surface of the cultures (with a few still visible spots of straw),. This maturing phase takes about five weeks.

4. Bury the cultures outside in the garden

Remove the plastic bags and bury the cultures spaced somewhat apart at a shadowy, moist location in the earth in the garden. Make sure the soil is nutritious by mixing e.g. mature compost or dried horse manure in the "planting hole". The cultures should be buried deep enough (flat, not upright), so that they can be covered with a layer of approx. 5 cm of soil. Press down the soil slightly. In the case of clay soils, it helps to put some sand into the hole under the cultures to avoid water logging.

Depending on the season, you should be able to harvest the first of several harvests approx. 7 to 12 weeks later. After the fruiting bodies just become visible in the earth, they only need max. 1 week until they are ready to harvest. The mushrooms normally grow in the whole clusters and you should remove the entire cluster each time you harvest.

Because theoretically other mushroom types could grow, check that the mushrooms are the correct, edible variety that you want to grow. You can compare the appearance with the photos of the mushrooms on our website

Important: make sure you harvest in good time and not too late and use the harvested mushrooms quickly, because this mushroom type has the peculiarity that it turns into dark liquid „ink“ when it is too ripe (the liquid comes from the spores). To judge the right point of harvesting, you should do it before the cap has come off of the stalk.

Horsetail fungus should be eaten within a few hours of the harvest. You can also eat the upper parts of the stalks. If you harvest early enough, you can dry the mushrooms in a desiccating machine to produce very spicy dry mushrooms.

As with other mushroom types, the first harvest is usually the largest. Whether more mushrooms grow in following years depends on the substrate and the nutrients present in the soil.