

THE HINDU

A new method for growing Shiitake mushroom

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Among various cultivated species of mushrooms, Shiitake variety has a good demand among consumers for its taste. Particularly in Northern India consumers prefer this mushroom since it is believed to be medicinal in quality. Presently, China and Japan are the bulk producers of this prized mushroom variety. Till some time there was no proper technology to grow this variety on a successful commercial scale but recently the Directorate of Mushroom Research (DMR), situated at Chmabaghat in Solan district and Indian Institute of Horticulture Research (IIHR), at Hassargatta near Bangalore have developed new techniques for growing this crop.

A farmer, Mr. Vikas Banyal, from Solan district, Himachal Pradesh, has further refined the growing technology by using willow wood as a substrate. He is the first farmer in the country to use willow tree wood as a substrate to grow Shiitake variety. According to Mr. Vikas this method gives a better and greater yield.

Initially Mr. Vikas was growing Shiitake on sawdust but was not able to get a good production. He got some scanty reference in literature about using willow tree logs as a medium for growing. He contacted the University which provided him willow logs for trying this as substrate.

“The substrate that is the medium is very important for mushroom cultivation. Just as a healthy soil helps good plant crop a good medium alone can help get a good yield.

“My initial attempts failed because I used sawdust that was poor in quality. It was then that some mushroom cultivation experts from the U.S. visited my farm and while interacting with them I got to know that they use logs from trees to grow mushrooms. They also advised me to try out the method on some popular growing trees in my region,” he says.

The farmer started his search for the same through several literatures and got in touch with Dr. Y. S. Parmar of the University of Horticulture and Forestry in his region.

Official help

The University was quite impressed by his dedication and perseverance and supplied him about 100 willow logs initially. From then on there was no looking back for Mr. Vikas. With an investment of just Rs,

6,000 some years back today he has established a company worth nearly Rs. 4 crores all earned from mushroom cultivation.

Explaining the procedure the entrepreneur says, “willow logs of 40 inch length and three to four inch diameter are ideal. Holes are drilled into the logs and spawns (in the form of bullets) are inserted into the holes and sealed with wax. The logs are kept in the open under shade. Fruiting of shiitake starts in just three months and continues for four to five years. The technique is cost effective and also consumes less time.”

In addition to the logs he also used the sawdust of the willow tree to grow the mushroom which proved even more effective as harvesting of the crop started in just 45 days.

He could harvest on an average 750 gm of mushroom from one kg of willow sawdust. The harvested mushrooms are fresh and fetch Rs. 200-500 per kg in the local market.

“This mushroom has a good shelf life and dried Shiitake is fetching up to Rs 2,000 per kg in the market. It can be grown in those places where temperature remains below 25 degree celsius. It can be easily grown in the hilly regions of northern, eastern and southern parts of the country.

In southern parts, cultivation can be done at Ooty, Coonoor, Chickmagalur, Kodagu and Kodaikanal. Munnar, Vagamon, Kudremukh,” says Dr. Harender Raj Gautam , Senior Scientist, Department of Plant Pathology, Dr. Y. S. Parmar University of Horticulture and Forestry, Nauni, Solan, Himachal Pradesh
Dr. N.B. Singh, Director of Extension says: “Mr. Vikas has been into mushroom cultivation since the last 25 years and has a multi-storeyed building in two acres in which he grows different varieties of this mushroom.

We had supplied the willow logs as medium for growing the shiitake mushroom. Shiitake mushroom grown on 1,000 Kg sawdust of willow gives an income of Rs 2 lakh a year.

The farmer’s income comes from selling the seeds of different varieties, compost to several farmers in Himachal Pradesh and many parts of northern India. In fact he is considered to be an authority in the state on this technology.”

Future plan

“Presently we are cultivating white button mushrooms, oyster mushrooms and Shiitake mushrooms besides making spawn and compost to cater to the small and marginal mushroom growers. We are also planning to set up canning and frozen mushroom processing units,” says Mr. Vikas.

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