



## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Mushrooms—Think Paper Not Plastic**

Fresh mushrooms are remarkably versatile. They add flavor to everything from salads to side dishes to entrees. But do you know the best way to store mushrooms and clean mushrooms?

Storing Mushrooms: Keep mushrooms refrigerated. They're best when used within several days after purchase. Do not rinse mushrooms until ready to use. **To prolong shelf life, store fresh mushrooms in a porous paper bag.** Always remove plastic overlay from packaged mushrooms. Avoid airtight containers—this causes moisture condensation which speeds spoilage.

When you are ready to use them, the best way to clean mushrooms is to gently wipe them with a damp cloth or soft brush to remove occasional peat moss particles. The other method is to rinse with cold water and pat dry with paper towels.

What happens if you purchase too many mushrooms and can't use them? Fresh mushrooms don't freeze well. But if it's really necessary to freeze them, first sauté in butter or oil or in a non-stick skillet without fat; cool slightly, then freeze in an airtight container up to one month.

When selecting mushrooms look for mushrooms with a fresh, smooth appearance, free from major blemishes, with a dry (not dried) surface. A closed veil (the thin membrane under the cap) indicates a delicate flavor; an open veil means a richer flavor.

How do mushroom grow? All mushrooms grow from microscopic spores, not seeds. Plants growing from spores are called fungi. A mature mushroom will drop as many as 16 billion spores. Spores must be collected in the nearly sterile environment of a laboratory and then used to inoculate grains or seeds to produce a product called spawn (the mushroom farmer's equivalent of seed).

Because mushrooms have no chlorophyll, they must get all their nutrients from the compost they grow in. The compost is scientifically formulated of various materials such as straw, corncobs, cottonseed and cocoa seed hulls, gypsum, and nitrogen supplements. Preparing the compost takes one to two weeks. Then it's pasteurized and placed in large trays or beds. Next the spawn is worked into the compost and the growing takes place in specially constructed houses, where the farmers can regulate the crucial aspects of heat and humidity.

In two to three weeks, the compost becomes filled with the root structure of the mushroom, a network of lacy white filaments called mycelium. At that point, a layer of pasteurized peat moss is spread over the compost. The temperature of the compost and the humidity of the room must be carefully controlled in order for the mycelium to develop fully. Eventually, tiny white protrusions form on the mycelium and push up through the peat moss. Farmers call this pinning. The pins continue to grow, becoming the mushroom caps, which are actually the fruit of the plant, just as a tomato is the fruit of a tomato plant. It

takes 17 to 25 days to produce mature mushrooms after the peat moss is applied. Size is no indication of maturity in mushrooms. Perfectly ripe ones vary from small buttons to large caps.

Each crop is harvested over a period of several weeks and then the house is emptied and steam-sterilized before the process begins again. The remaining compost is recycled for potting soil. The harvested mushrooms are set in carts, refrigerated and then packaged and shipped quickly to supermarkets, food processors and restaurants. The entire process from the time the farmer starts preparing the compost until the mushrooms are harvested and shipped to market takes about four months.

*Referenced from: Catherine Lamp, UCCE Tulare County; Source: <http://www.mushroomcouncil.com/grow/grow.html>*