



Ken Mudge, associate professor at Cornell University, has been involved in agroforestry research, teaching, and extension for over twenty years. His domestic and international research has focused on nontimber forest products including nitrogen-fixing trees, American ginseng, forest-cultivated mushrooms, and others. He teaches both on-campus and online courses in forest farming, plant propagation, and grafting. He is Director of the MacDaniels Nut Grove, which is the foremost center for forest-farming education in the country. Mudge was the principal investigator on a NE SARE-funded extension project in collaboration with the University of Vermont and Chatham University that trained forest owners in shiitake mushroom farming as a business enterprise. He and coauthor Steve Gabriel have recently published the guidebook *Best Management Practices for Log-Based Shiitake Cultivation in the Northeastern United States*. He is the coordinator of the Northeast Forest Mushroom Growers Network (blogs.cornell.edu/mushrooms).

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Forest Cultivated Mushrooms, a Rotten Business

Specialty forest mushroom include such delicacies as shiitake, oyster, lion's mane and wine cap which can be cultivated on wood substrates, as non timber forest products for forest farming. Unfortunately other choice wild edible mushrooms like chanterelles, morels, or boletes are not included because they cannot be deliberately cultivated. Shiitake is by far the most developed of the specialty forest mushrooms from the standpoint of both cultivation and marketing. There are four stages that the prospective grower must consider for forest cultivation of shiitake. Acquisition of substrate logs is the first one. What kinds of trees and when to cut them are the main considerations? Shortly after that comes inoculation of logs with the appropriate shiitake strain. The next stage requires some patience. The logs must be managed in a shady laying yard for up to a year to allow the fungus time to adequately colonize the log before it is ready to convert wood into mushrooms. After this so called "spawn run", the focus shifts to fruiting, harvesting and marketing of the mushrooms. Well managed logs can be productive for 3 or more years.

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