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Experience With a Mushroom

Bed

O start mushroom beds without any previous knowledge of their special requirement and ob-

possible and fortune favors some beginners with adequate reward. However, it is because the conditions of growth have all been favorable, by happy accident or otherwise, that immediate

success comes to the inexperienced grower of mushrooms.

The cellar where the writer's experiments with mushroom-growing were conducted was built specially for the purpose. It was constructed like a root-cellar against a side hill with a roof of its own. This, covered with heavy rubber paper on wooden planks was again protected by an overlay of a few inches of soil and turf. The walls were of stone (two sides), and The walls were of stone (two sides), and were protected by earth banked to the roof, leaving only the door with the few steps descending from the ground really exposed to the weather. All the storms and high winds coming from the hilltop swept across the roof, and a large maple tree shaded it from the summer sun. The moist air of the interior promoted the growth of from the summer sun. The moist air of the interior promoted the growth of the mushrooms naturally, but a water-pipe leading from a spring was led into the cellar and furnished a further and con-venient water supply, later found to be of great service. great service.

great service.

During the mild weather of spring and autumn this cellar proved an ideal place for mushroom culture. In the heat of summer with the doors and window kept closed during the day and open for ventilation at night, the temperature was maintained at the degree of coolness of the night, whatever that happened to be. Except during the very warmest weather, this was usually about sixty degrees. In winter we were obliged to keep the temperature at the desired degree by the aid of oil heaters. of oil heaters.

Mushroom growers lay great stress on the proper preparation of the compost. To get the best results, it is desirable that the manure be as fresh as possible, not over six months old, kept under cover from the rain if possible, and mixed with straw. When brought from the stable it must be thoroughly and evenly wet down with a hose, allowed to stand until fermented by the heat that immediately ensues and then turned to be wet down again if necessary before use in the beds. again if necessary before use in the beds.

This spawn is usually obtained from This spawn is usually obtained from dealers, or, better still, may be had directly from those who make it and give one a guarantee of its freshness. Broken up into small cubes about two or three inches in bulk, this is planted in the beds when the temperature is right for receiving it. About seventy-five degrees is generally considered the best. These plantings were made at a distance of nine inches apart each way. Two weeks after the planting the beds were covered with light loam to the depth of one and one-half loam to the depth of one and one-half inches. This was first screened and moistened as it would take too much moistened to the half inches. moistened as it would take too much moisture from the bed if put on dry. While the mushrooms obtain their nourishment from the compost beneath, it is desirable to have the soil on top to afford a firm foothold for the roots and also to maintain the natural warmth of the manure in the bed.

But this is anticipating. Our mush-room beds (with oil stoves burning to keep room beds (with oil stoves burning to keep the temperature of the cellar up to from fifty to sixty degrees during cold winter weather) soon required watering to keep the top soil moist all the time, and in spite of the utmost care in using the finest possible spray from the hose, more water than we realized soaked down into the compost and nearly ruined the beds. Some of the spawn died. A little of it spread and we gathered in the course of time some very large and handsome mushrooms in spite of sawdust, cold cellar and rooms in spite of sawdust, cold cellar and too much watering of the beds.

When these cold beds were taken out the compost furnished splendid soil for the garden, being just in proper condition then for the plants to feed upon. Mushrooms take nothing from the manure that plants need. When fresh beds were made up in the mushroom cellar, quite different plants need. When fresh beds were made up in the mushroom cellar, quite different conditions prevailed from those of the winter. It was really summer then. The manure obtained this time was from the manure obtained the baddise. The manure obtained this time was from stables where straw was used for bedding horses. The process of wetting it down was carefully managed. A second turning after it had stood for ten days to heat up was looked after and the heap was tested with a long, pointed brass thermometer, to note the state of the interior. It was necessary to open places for the air

to circulate to prevent burn-ing. By the time this was put into the cellar and evenly spread to the depth of nine tain successful results with the first venture is not im- JOSEPHINE BURLEIGH sixty degrees, it soon began to

heat up again to ninety de-Then, when the temperature of the mass had fallen to eighty degrees with the compost quite moist, planting was again undertaken with fresh hopes for a greater

The heat of summer now made it neces sary to keep the cellar closed during the day and open at night for ventilation. The beds were often tested with the thermometer for their heat which slowly dropped mometer for their heat which slowly dropped to sixty degrees. The day air of summer during a long "dry spell" of weather made some moistening of the soil occasionally necessary and when, after two months from the time of planting the spawn, the beds began to blossom with mushrooms, big and little, in clumps of a dozen to fifty, it was a very pretty sight. The enduring patience of the owner at last had its reward!

last had its reward!

These beds had been made of various sizes, some above the lower ones, so that all the space of the cellar could be utilized in the space of the cellar could be above. so that all the space of the cellar could be utilized in their planting. The upper tier was made of planks supported on timbers four feet above the lower beds. A floor of heavy planks was also laid with sufficient space below for any water to find its way out that might trickle down from the rocks of the upper sides of the cellar. A drain pipe led this off so that during the wet season no water should get to the beds from below.

Mushrooms must be picked as soon as

Mushrooms must be picked as soon as they reach full size and just before the frill breaks away from the stem. They gain no more in weight if left longer, but exhaust the bed too soon like a plant whose blossoms on to send. They may be laid blossoms go to seed. They may be laid back on the bed after picking, where in the same moist air in which they have grown they will continue to open. The earth clinging to their roots keeps them fresh for some time

After gathering all the mushrooms they are taken out into the light on a tray, where the dirt is carefully scraped from the stem, the tops dusted off with a camel's hair brush and after drying off a bit are ready for packing in boxes or baskets.

In cool weather mushrooms will keep In cool weather mushrooms will keep in good condition for ten days, but in hot weather they must be kept in the ice-box until eaten. Particularly in August will the maggots develop in the lower part of the stem and work up into the top unless every precaution is taken to destroy the small fly whose larvæ breed in the mushroom bed during warm weather. We found the burning of tobacco stems with the place shut tight for some hours afterwards would kill the fly and the use of non-poisonous insecticide sprayed over of non-poisonous insecticide sprayed over the bed would help to keep the pest down. This also had to be used after old beds were taken out on the floor and sides of the help before never made UR. were taken out on the floor and sides of the beds before new ones were made up. Covering the beds with autumn leaves or straw when the weather is very cold helps to keep the beds warm and also to keep the moisture from drying out. Occasionally spraying the bed with warm water containing saltpeter in solution we found increased the productiveness and size of the mushrooms. size of the mushrooms.

Keeping the temperature as nearly as possible at one point also helps their growth, as mushrooms like best the temperature between fifty and sixty degrees.

A product always more or less present in compost heaps of manure must not be mistaken for the edible mushroom. Often appearing before the bed is planted and sometimes of the second covered and second covered cove and sometimes after it has been covered with loam these poisonous growths appear with loam these poisonous growths appropriate with long, thin stems, and small tops, quickly turning black and falling over they disappear and cannot be mistaken for mushrooms by any one familiar with them

A small rungi about as large as matches also sometimes appear in spots, but these, like a yellowish mold coming on the top of the loam, soon disappear and cause no damage. If the soil with which the bed has been covered has been taken from a wet, boggy place, swamp mushrooms are likely to appear.

For the encouragement of those who aim to grow mushrooms to sell, we have been told that a certain woman gardener undertook their cultivation at her country place and realized. place and realized enough from their sale to buy an automobile. We have not attained to that felicity as yet; but hope in time to provide a pony in time to provide ourselves with a pony cart to take the produce of our mushroom beds to the railway station.