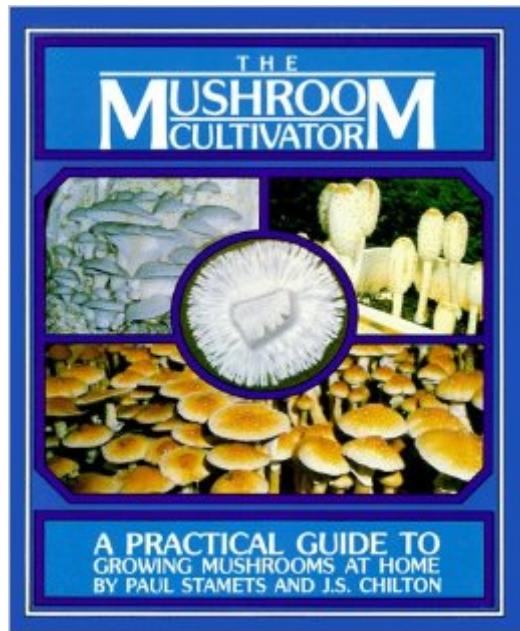


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# The Mushroom Cultivator: A Practical Guide To Growing Mushrooms At Home



## Synopsis

The book you are about to read is a milestone in the new awareness of mushrooms. The Mushroom Cultivator by Paul Stamets and J.S. Chilton is easily the best source of information on growing mushrooms at home. The authors demystify the art of mushroom cultivation and put mastery of it within everyone's reach. If you have been searching for information on this topic, you will find it to be all that you have been looking for. Includes detailed growth requirements for 15 mushroom species, sterile culture and mushroom spawn preparation techniques, procedures for strain selection and development, practical preparation methods for compost and bulk substrates, the mushroom life cycle and mushroom genetics, identification of the major competitor molds, pathogens and pests, and guidelines for the construction of mushroom growing rooms.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Contrary to what many cultivation cognoscenti repeatedly say, this book is not the `bible' of mushroom cultivation. Although the amount of information in this book is impressive, it is limited to a handful of species, and gives exact growth parameters for a few select mushrooms, principally those belonging to Agaricus, Pleurotus, Psilocybe/Panaeolus, and Stropharia. It should also be noted that while some species, such as Pleurotus and Agaricus are relatively easy to cultivate, others such as Stropharia and Psilocybe/Panaeolus may be difficult to cultivate even under the most favorable conditions. As many of the topics in the book are more appropriate for the small mushroom farm, the book is anything but practical for home-based cultivation. As a result, using this

book as a basis for hobby cultivation will more than likely take the fun out of cultivation entirely. That said, the book explains the science behind mushroom cultivation very well, but places considerable emphasis on composting and *Agaricus/Psilocybe* production. The emphasis on *Agaricus* is understandable, as it is a commercially cultivated mushroom with mass appeal, but *Psilocybe* species are covered in a bit too much detail for my taste. More lab techniques are presented in this book than in Stamet's *Growing Gourmet Mushrooms*, and the authors provide detailed info on starting cultures from scratch, spawn maintenance and propagation, as well as setting up your own lab. One very strong selling point of the book is the authors' elaboration on the importance of good environmental control and how to achieve it, although again, the information on this topic would be more appropriate for a farm than a home. The authors also include two very detailed chapters giving information on invertebrate (insect) and microbial pests/contaminants and provide an excellent chapter on trouble-shooting during cultivation, focusing in particular on microbial pests/contaminants. The book includes a fairly good run-down on cultivation using non-composted substrates, but it could be expanded to include more substrates, more cultivation strategies, and more mushroom species that grow well on non-composted substrates. However, Stamets and Chilton primarily refer to varieties of alder, which is readily available in riparian and montane habitats in the Pacific Northwest, and while they do provide the reader with material properties on other suitable hardwood substrates such as oak, beech, and birch in an appendix, a future edition should endeavor to show the reader the same techniques using those substrates. The authors end the book with a chapter that briefly explains the fundamentals of genetics and reproduction of edible mushrooms. The book's appendices contain invaluable information such as the construction of air and environmental systems, the composition of various potential substrates, data collection records and conversion tables, all of which do much to enhance its appeal to mushroom farmers. Finally, the book also includes a comprehensive and understandable glossary of key terms, a detailed bibliography, and a comprehensive index. Essentially, the book's emphasis is on those mushroom species that can be grown with ease on compost with a few commercial species, such as shiitake, enoki, and oyster thrown in to round out the mix. You really have to look elsewhere for more detailed information on the medicinal properties of mushrooms and mushroom growing resources. Additionally, I found the absence of good, reliable economic data on mushroom cultivation, especially from the small farm or business standpoint to be lacking in both of Stamet's texts. While this text in particular was very comprehensive when it came mushroom science, I found myself looking to Stamet's *Growing Gourmet Mushrooms* for historical, cultural, taxonomic and medicinal information on edibles. Additionally, *Growing Gourmet Mushrooms* emphasized the edibles more,

while this book played up the hallucinogenic mushrooms. Finally, better quality pictures, especially those in color and high resolution, would add significant value to this book. In sum, while the average hobby cultivator just embarking on mushroom growing may find the information a bit too complicated, those looking to turn their hobby into a small farm venture will find it to be invaluable. To fully employ the techniques and methods presented in this book, the aspiring cultivator would have to invest a considerable amount of time and money. As such, I believe that this book is an excellent complement to a small farm operation. Those individuals looking to embark on hobby mushroom growing should first read Hajo Hadeler's *Medicinal Mushrooms You Can Grow*, and Paul Stamet's *Growing Gourmet and Medicinal Mushrooms*. Once the hobbyist is thoroughly familiar with the topic and the ins and outs of micro-scale (home-based) cultivation, I would strongly recommend that he or she pick up this book. As such, I see this as being more for folks who are serious about running a small farm or mushroom business, as most hobby growers would not even take the trouble to set up their own lab, or even maintain starter cultures beyond grain spawn. Thus, I recommend that this book be bought only after more basic information on mushrooms and their cultivation has been fully acquired.

I have read this and several other mushroom cultivation books. This book, coupled with Stamet's *Growing Gourmet and Medicinal Mushrooms*, makes for the absolute best reference materials for growing your own mushrooms. That said, I'll mention the only thing that may disappoint a reader. His treatment of agar techniques in either of his cultivation books leaves a little to be desired. If you feel uncomfortable working with petri dishes after reading his sections on it, you may wish to check out "Laboratory Exercises in Microbiology" (ISBN 0-697-35443-1) by Harley and Prescott. It is a little more than a fellow needs to know about microbiology, but it is an excellent reference for acquainting on with aseptic agar techniques. Aside from this, Stamets has certainly beaten the competition with this book!

If you were to buy only one book on mushroom cultivation, this would be the best choice. It can certainly stand-alone in that it provides all the info the reader needs to cultivate mushrooms. Although psilocybian mushrooms are included these are by no means the exclusive or main focus of this book. For the most part, the book is concerned with legal edible mushrooms that can be grown in the home or yard. Absolute beginners can certainly start with this book and no other book will be necessary to provide all that the reader needs to know from beginning to end of the mushroom growing process. It must be mentioned that this book does not cover the popular "PF

tek" (the "Psilocybe Fanaticus technique" also known as the "jar tek"), the simple technique utilizing canning jars full of substrate and inoculating them with syringes of spores suspended in water. Readers interested in this technique (which, after all seems the easiest and most practical) would find all they need to know on this technique at the Shroomery.org web site and others like it. This book was originally published in 1983, years before the "PF tek" was innovated. Among the technique that this book does cover are the use of agar petri dish culture, culture slants, casing, grain spawn, composting, log-plugging and more. There is also a wealth of info on mushroom contaminants - how to spot them and how to deal with them. Therefore we can say that while this book does not cover the most simple of techniques, it certainly covers all other techniques suitable for absolute beginners and for those looking to expand their hobby beyond the beginners' methods. The authors are obviously sincerely interested in mushrooms in general and in the cultivation of edible mushrooms. The info on these edible mushrooms is not included as an excuse to also include info on the cultivation of psilocybian mushrooms, nor are psilocybian mushrooms cryptically referred to. Rather, psilocybian mushrooms are merely presented as one of many types of mushrooms that can be grown with simple techniques at home. This is by no means a drug manufacturing guidebook disguised as a book on edible mushroom cultivation nor is it one that distances itself from the cultivation of psilocybian mushrooms. If the reader is interested in the cultivation of mushrooms at home, this book gets a high recommendation. These two authors have also written Growing Gourmet and Medicinal Mushrooms which is similar in scope but probably a better second choice rather than first choice for this topic. Paul Stamets has also authored Mycelium Running: How Mushrooms Can Help Save the World, Psilocybin Mushrooms of the World: An Identification Guide, MycoMedicinals: an Informational Treatise of Mushrooms, Psilocybe Mushrooms and Their Allies and also runs the company Fungi Perfecti which offers kits for growing mushrooms at home, a variety of mushroom related books, technical supplies and which also offers educational seminars. If you want to grow mushrooms at home and the "PF - Tek" is good enough for you, this book would be unnecessary for you. If you have got the hang of the "PF - Tek" but you are interested in trying other techniques and approaches this book is highly recommended for you.

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