



## Care and Feeding of Your Mushroom Log

February 18, 2011

**Location:** Your mushroom log prefers a protected, shady location with high humidity. Good choices are the north side of buildings, under trees or shrubs, in any shady area where it won't be exposed to hot sun, but will get wet when it rains. The log does not need any special treatment during the winter, as long as it is protected from winter winds that may dry it out too much. You can lean it up against a fence or stack multiple logs like a log cabin. Horizontal placement helps retain moisture. Placing it close to a rain barrel or other source of water makes dowsing it occasionally more convenient. Another thing to consider when placing your log: it should be in a location where you have an opportunity to check on it regularly. Natural fruiting can occur quickly and you want to catch the mushrooms at their prime for picking.

**Fruiting:** Before mushrooms can be produced, the mycelium must fully occupy the cellular structure of the log. This can take anywhere from 6 months to 2 years, depending on a number of variables including weather conditions, the viability of the spawn, and the size of the log. The easiest way to know when the incubation period is complete is when your log produces mushrooms spontaneously, usually about a week after a heavy rain when the ambient temperatures are favorable, such as late spring or early fall. Mushrooms are ready to be picked when the cap has opened up to about 80% of its maximum; the cap will still be convex with just a little curled rim, but the gills are fully visible. Carefully twist and pull the mushroom from the log. It will feel solid and a bit heavy. An overripe mushroom will become convex, start to look tattered around the edges, may have bugs and otherwise appear unappetizing. Store mushrooms in the refrigerator until ready to eat. Do not wash, but if there appears to be dust or bark particles, you may carefully wipe them off with a damp cloth. Tapping the mushroom against your cupped hand will dislodge any critters.

**Forcing:** Once your log has started to produce, you may now "force" it by simulating ideal weather conditions for fruiting. Soak the log overnight completely submerged in water, such as in a rain barrel, pond, creek, or stock tank. Remove the log and monitor it for the next few days. You should see little buttons emerging within a few days and fully mature mushrooms should be available for harvest in about a week. After the log has produced, it requires a rest period of 8 weeks or so. Then you can force it again. Forcing will work only as long as other weather conditions are appropriate. It is less likely to be successful during hot, dry periods, e.g., late July and August here in Ohio. If you do not get a successful fruiting, wait a few weeks and try again.

**Long term:** Remember, your mushroom log is home to a living creature and like any other, it must have the conditions necessary to thrive. The lifespan of your log depends on many things, but a good, hardwood log with a healthy strain of spawn that is well-tended should produce for a number of years, usually 3-5 or longer for larger logs. The log will start to decay over time as the resident fungus consumes available nutrients. It will become noticeably lighter weight, other fungi such as turkey tail may start to appear, and yields will peak and then start to decline as the log ages. This is normal and mirrors the natural process of decay and renewal in the wild.

*Janell K. Baran  
Blue Owl Hollow/Blue Owl Garden Emporium  
6000 Porter Road, NE  
Newark, OH 43055  
<http://www.blueowlgarden.com/>*