

Special Column
Mushrooms
Darrell Blackwelder
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John Herron called me one day in December and told me he had an idea and I wasn't going to change his mind. Herron had ambitions of growing mushrooms in an abandoned mill. He has succeeded. Herron, a grading contractor, has successfully converted the old Corriher-Linn dye plant on Meriah Street in Landis now into an oyster mushroom factory. Herron along with partners Randy Fuller, Roger Safrit and Greg Hager are now produce approximately 100 pounds of golden, brown phoenix, and blue tree oyster mushrooms a week. Oyster mushrooms, grown in filtered light and constant mist are frequently used in as a delicacy in restaurants featuring sophisticated cuisine. Herron's operation, *Landis Gourmet Mushrooms*, is now supplying local restaurants with these tasty delights.

Herron's success growing these mushrooms did not happen overnight. The production process took a year of research and experimenting with different mushroom spawn in small plastic bags to perfect this unconventional crop.

Herron's production process relies heavily on finely chipped recycled American-made cardboard as the growing medium for the spawn or mushroom spores. Cornstarch is then added which seems to be the perfect growing medium for the spores. Through trial and error, Herron and his partners discovered that tall, slender plastic bags filled with the medium could produce the mushrooms in sufficient quantity to supply local restaurateurs.

A wood fired oven doubles to supply steam to heat the building and sterilize the medium. Bags of mushroom medium are kept at a constant temperature between 55-65 degrees.

Two weeks after inoculation, mushrooms blossom through a series of pin holes neatly punched in the sides on 4 inch centers. Ready for harvest, oyster mushrooms are very perishable remaining turgid and fresh for only a few days. Therefore, the process of producing oyster mushrooms is an ongoing process.

This operation uses only natural products with an ultimate goal to be USDA Organically Certified as soon as possible. Dr. Omoanghe Isikhuemhen known also as Dr. Oman, mushroom researcher at NC A& T State University, is mentoring Herron to produce high quality organically grown mushrooms.

Use not only of an abandoned mill but recycled products and clever design makes this operation quite unique. Spent growing medium will be sold as compost. Herron hopes to install solar panels and wind turbines to supplement their energy requirements.

Even though researching and growing oyster mushrooms has been a challenge, Herron plans to expand the operation and grow other mushroom types, including shiitake mushrooms. The primary market for *Landis Gourmet Mushrooms* is gourmet restaurants, but Herron also sells to anyone that wants to try fresh, delectable mushrooms. Herron can be contacted via e-mail at mushroommill@yahoo.com or by phone at 704-202-1216 for information about availability, sales and his operation.