

Fundamentals of Advanced Indoor Mushroom Growing

Interview with Brandon Owen

How did you get into mushrooms?

I got into mushrooms about five years ago. I was looking for a competitive advantage. I knew that sometimes we don't do well because we don't feel well and I figured food would be a great place to start so I switched my diet up and I started eating more plants and mushrooms. So that kinda started the obsession.

It's like the spores, right? You start with a little bit and it grows.

That's right, yeah.

Ok cool. What's your favorite mushroom?

That's a loaded question! My favorite mushroom is the mushroom that I'm eating right now. So that'll always just depend on whichever one that I have access to is my favorite.

I got into cultivation before I got into identification of wild mushrooms, so I taught myself how to grow mushrooms. I had been growing mushrooms for a few years, and then I met the folks here at Mushroom Mountain. I was friends with them some time before I started working here, so it was a real easy transition over here. I worked in corporate sales before this and transitioned over. Mushroom Mountain has taught me a lot about the land, and I've brought the two together: cultivation and identification.

So you started indoors and then slowly expanded outdoors?

Yeah and now I'm trying to bring it back full circle. The main thing with the course is that all those factors are self-sustainability, medicine, money. The stuff that I want to teach the people in the course, they'll be able to pivot any direction they want to: mycoremediation. There's still a lot to be discovered with mushrooms, so the more an individual knows how to do themselves the more power they have. Knowing that front-end of cultivation is essential provides the keys to the kingdom.

It seems to me that it could be pretty overwhelming if you didn't know anything about mushrooms, or if you're just starting out, to be in the wild or encounter them. People sometimes have fears about what's poisonous or not knowing the difference. If you start small in your home, you kinda know what you're growing and what you're getting into and it can start the learning process. It sounds like with the workshop, you're wanting to take people on the journey that you took yourself, as an entry point?

Yeah. So I self-taught cultivation, it was online. But nonetheless, I was able to get through it because I had a community online. That enabled me to tap into information and with the course here, it's a hands-on course so instead of trying to muddle through it with learning the techniques on the videos or through the forms, you'll kind of have somebody here who can critique you and show you the way with the process.

So you don't have to filter through a million Reddit threads for information. And you learn best practices too, how do you prevent contamination from happening and stuff like that.

Yeah.

Where is home for you?

Upstate SC

What do you do for fun?

Mostly mushroom stuff right now. I've been kinda single hyper focused with that. I don't care to put myself out there too much online, but the mushrooms I care a lot about. If I can make some money with what I care about, I'm cool with that. The process with making money online through these platforms you know they're eventually all still gatekeepers in a way because they have requirements and they could shut me down at any point. So me offering a way for people to show their support and give them something to value is why I've taken matters in my own hands until I get monetized. And that's where the shirts come into play and the merch and the coloring books and stuff, that's just all for the mushroom lovers. Most of my shop stuff is specifically dedicated to the mushroom niche.

That makes sense. We talked a little about the workshop. Is there more that you wanna say? One of my questions was about the difference between outdoor and indoor cultivation. You talked about that some. Is there anything I need to add to that?

Absolutely, this course is so essential because with outdoor cultivation you still have so many gaps missing in the puzzle. So you still don't have the keys to the kingdom, you're really dependent. I'm huge on self-sustainability, the more we can do for ourselves the less we depend on the government for food and medicine. Mushrooms being that they have all the essential proteins, minerals and vitamins, that plays a huge role in that. And learning how to cultivate them and identify them I think is just a really big part of that. I'm personally plant-based, I haven't eaten meat in almost five years. That's a whole other market that I could entertain because essentially mushrooms are my meat substitute. With shortages or pandemics or catastrophic events comes shortages in supply and demand, and things not being in the store. People knowing that front-end of cultivation, because once they know it, a lot of my library is built from nature. Knowing how to work with spore prints, knowing how to regenerate the culture such as cloning it or even regeneration such as bringing back dried mushrooms. If you come across dried mushrooms you can clone those. So you can go in the grocery store and get

mushrooms in the grocery store and clone them. So really the whole course is about power. One of the fastest ways to make money online is to talk about how to make money online. It's this huge circle of information, whereas this is an actual skillset and once you have it, it's yours for years. There's not a lot that really changes about it, the names change and new techniques are discovered. But there's this foundation with it and once you have that foundation, once again, which a lot of this course will offer, you are able to pivot to those big three areas that I mentioned in the beginning which would be food, medicine, or money. Or all three if you choose.

That's so awesome to have it simplified. You do such a good job of pinpointing what your core motivation is and what you wanna share with other people. I think people are really concerned about these things right now. Especially with food costs going up. Even if you're not worried about your whole entire food supply getting cut off, just being able to feed yourself and not spend all your money doing it is a concern. Being able to pay your rent and still eat.

A real easy one would be shiitake mushrooms. If you go into the grocery store, organic shiitake mushrooms are often easily double digits per pound. How much more organic does it get than just growing them yourself on trees you've felled or making wood chip beds for the species? With food shortage, when you learn identification characteristics of foraging you don't even pay taxes on the food. The only thing you pay for is the knowledge and the time it took to learn it and gas money and some snacks. After that, a lot of these mushrooms you can dry and have as a food source throughout the year. Even more than that, when I speak of building my library from nature, one delicious mushroom is maitake (*grifola fondrosa* or hen of the woods), and that is a mushroom that you can find in the wild and then take it home and cultivate it yourself in your yard. So having that know-how, just like people clone plants, you can clone the mushroom and understand the process and its specific parameters.

How do you cook the maitake?

For me and all my mushrooms, my cooking foundation is about the same. I like to use a cast iron pan. Mushrooms are about 80-90% water, so I put the mushrooms on the pan first and let some of the water evaporate out. At the point when the mushrooms have shrunk down, I add oil, salt, and pepper. If you add moisture too soon when there's a lot of water, they will be too mushy. You'll really miss out on a lot of that meaty flavor. But you'll have to learn as you go and cook the mushrooms a lot. Sometimes you'll have mushrooms that are really dry and don't have a lot of water in them, so if you go with that method of evaporation you'll wanna not cook them too much or they'll burn. They're so juicy. And also cook mushrooms separate from the vegetables. I'm plant-based now but I was a huge meat eater and I really like my meals to make me satiated. I will cook the mushrooms first and then cook the vegetables in a separate pan, or in the same pan at a later time. After I mix the two together and that really makes the dish pop because they have different cooking methods and consistencies. It makes the meals a lot meatier. Adding the mushrooms back to the vegetables, they get the heat back up, because cold mushrooms aren't really that good.

So I'm excited about this course. I was hoping to get about 10 or 15 people. I wanted to do good, I wanted to make Olga proud, make myself proud and generate this place some revenue. I mean it does fine without me generating revenue but help out and play my part and also grow as a person too.

Absolutely, and it's kind of a next step, putting yourself out there, sharing some knowledge and it's amazing what happens when you do that. Like you were saying, so much of what you do is online but being able to distill a lot of that down for other people and share what's really relevant. You learn so much more in person. You spend hours online for what you could learn in 5 minutes in person.

Absolutely. Hands down for cultivation but more so for identification of mushrooms, the fastest way to learn the skills is to hang out with mushroom people. And you essentially only have to hang out with them for 9 months, because there's 3 months where there's not really anything growing. That's where knowing how to cultivate comes in, especially if someone stays in a different area than we stay because then they'll have to play by different weather rules.

What should people expect? Do they need to bring anything? Is there anything that they might wanna do to prepare, to get for their home for when they get back and they're excited to continue the momentum?

Well they'll leave with some items. I was gonna have them leave with some petri dishes that we inoculate and a bag or something to fruit out of. I'm trying to find something that they can leave with as well. I don't really think they're gonna need to bring anything except for a way to take notes. If they have an ipad or computer and want to read along on their device, they can do that. But for the most part, the Powerpoint is broken up into bullet points and then I'll just be talking about the bullet points.

Looking forward to it! Thanks for the interview.