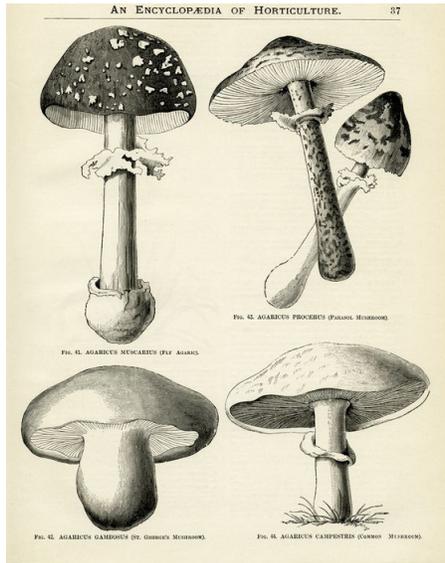


# Certifying Cultivated Mushrooms

by Joan Cheetham, MCS Certification Specialist

Mushrooms are gaining in popularity both because they are tasty and delicious and because recent research has demonstrated their exceptional health benefits. According to the Mayo Clinic website, mushrooms contain a variety of bioactive compounds that act as antioxidants. Antioxidants can protect us from cancer and heart disease, as well as moderate blood sugar levels. Regular mushroom consumption has been shown to lower risks for both cancer and heart disease. Mushrooms are also good sources of Vitamins D and B12.

Mushrooms are relatively easy to grow as long as one has a source of suitable substrate materials. There are no specific National Organic Program (NOP) mushroom standards, therefore, MCS certifies mushrooms in accordance with the National Organic Standards Board recommendations, as well as all other applicable sections of the NOP Organic Standard. Details of the MCS Mushroom Standard can be found on pages 22-23 of our current Practice Manual, which is available on our website. You can also download the two-page MCS Mushroom Cultivation Supplement which mushroom growers need to fill out and submit to MCS.



There are several important points to keep in mind when planning to grow and certify mushrooms. Mushroom spawn is generally purchased and must be certified organic, except that, non-organically produced spawn that has not been treated with a prohibited substance or raised on genetically modified substrate,

may be used when organically produced spawn is not commercially available. *Field and Forest Products, Inc.* in Wisconsin is one source for quality, organic spawn for a variety of mushroom species. Shiitake and oyster are two mushrooms being successfully grown in Maine without any special facilities.

Mushroom growth substrate must be certified organic if it is an agricultural product, such as straw or grain. Sawdust, wood chips, logs or other materials derived from wood used as a growth substrate must come from trees in areas free of prohibited materials for at least three years, and must not have been treated with a prohibited substance after tree harvest. Generally, a landowner affidavit is needed for forest areas where logs are harvested.

An excellent guide to growing edible mushrooms is the book *Growing Gourmet and Medicinal Mushrooms* (Third Edition) by Paul Stamets, Ten Speed Press.

For more information please visit the MOFGA Certification Services website at <http://www.mofgacertification.org> or call the certification office at 568-6030.

## TREATED LUMBER

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Placement of fencing that would result in likely or certain contact between livestock and lumber treated with prohibited materials would be prohibited by the USDA organic regulations.

### Replacement Purposes

Lumber treated with prohibited materials must not be used for replacement purposes after obtaining organic certification, if the lumber is to be in contact with soil, crops or livestock. Lumber treated with prohibited materials that was previously installed or stored outside of organic production areas (no contact with soil, crops or livestock) may not be moved into organic production areas, where it will contact soil, crops or livestock.

### Buffers and Barriers

Buffer zones and barriers, when effectively established, can serve to prevent contact between lumber treated with prohibited materials and soil, crops, or livestock. When contact is effectively prevented, these are acceptable means of complying with USDA organic regulations. The management practices and physical barriers established to prevent contact must be described in a producer's organic system plan.

Buffer zones must be sufficiently sized or designed to prevent unintended contact. Barriers can include electric fencing, barbed wire, metal flashing, and untreated lumber (used to prevent contact between livestock and treated wood, for example). If a barrier will not sufficiently prevent contact, installation of a barrier is not an acceptable means to comply with USDA organic regulations. If a barrier is subject to degradation, decay, or other processes that result in the loss of effectiveness of the barrier, the producer must replace, repair or reapply the barrier at appropriate intervals.

*Again at this point this is still a draft guidance. There are some uncertainties that MOFGA and other certifiers have asked the NOP to clarify. We will make sure to keep you posted! Please as always make sure to contact us (even though I grit my teeth) if you are planning on using any treated lumber for your farm projects.*

