

Growing the Specialty Mushroom Industry in the NYC and Regional Foodshed

By Yolanda Gonzalez



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Project Partners:



Specialty mushrooms are a low-input, high value niche crop, with U.S. consumer demand increasing by 4% annually. Given the flexible scale of production systems, mushrooms have the potential to be incorporated into a diverse range of small and mid-sized farms in urban and rural settings. As a response to this growing demand for both mushrooms and technical production knowledge, Yolanda Gonzalez, Urban Agriculture Specialist from Harvest NY, and the Cornell Small Farms Program, along with partners Farm School NYC, Just Food, and Grow NYC, were awarded two multi-year grants.

The first grant is the USDA NIFA Grant “Expanding Specialty Mushroom Production on Urban and Rural Small Farms,” which will engage growers, service provider organizations, and industry partners to enhance the collective knowledge base and capacity of farmers to grow specialty mushrooms and sell them profitably to local and regional markets within 250 miles of New York City. The second grant is the Northeast SARE Professional Development Program “Spawning a network of northeast mushroom educators serving urban and rural farmer audiences,” increasing the educational capacity through a network of Community Mushroom Educators throughout the region.

As part of the grants, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Farm School NYC, and Just Food will be hosting a “Learn to Grow Mushrooms” summer workshop series in the following locations: Wed, July 17th- Isabahlia Farms (Brooklyn) 5:30 - 7:30pm, Aug. 24th – Red Hook Farms (Brooklyn) 12:00 - 2:00pm, and Sept. 18th- Kelly St. Community Garden (Bronx) 5:30 - 7:30pm.

Both a food and a medicine, mushrooms are easy to grow at home and on gardens and farms, with minimal startup costs and materials that many may already have on hand. In these workshops, we will be teaching New York City residents how to inoculate a shiitake log, grow oysters on straw, and plant wine cap in wood chips. Participants will be able to take materials home with them free of charge. We will emphasize the potential for growing mushrooms as a small enterprise and discuss production systems that are scalable and highly adaptable to a wide range of farms in both rural and urban settings.



The wine cap mushroom, featured as part of the mushroom workshop series this summer



“Mushroom Growth Chamber” designed by Cornell Small Farms Veteran Program