

Totem Method for Cultivating Oyster & Lion's Mane Mushrooms

Oyster (*Pleurotus spp.*) and Lions Mane (*Hericium spp.*) mushrooms are voracious colonizers of a wide range of substrates and are therefore fairly easy to grow.

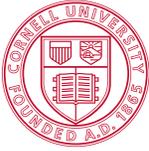


The totem method is reputed to, and in our experience does “fruit” (produce mushrooms) sooner and more prolifically than the bolt inoculation method commonly used for shiitake mushrooms. Since these mushrooms cannot be “forced” (soaked) to encourage fruiting like the Shiitake can, the totem method has proven to be the best method for efficient fruiting of these two species, which most often provide natural flushes of mushrooms in the spring and/or fall of a growing season.

As the name implies, the totem method involves vertically stacking short sections of logs on top of each other with a layer of mushroom spawn beneath the stack and between each section. The method described below involves stacking only 2 sections per totem, but stacking 3 or more sections per totem is possible if you are able to secure the stack so it won't fall over.

Materials:

- Fresh cut logs, 9 - 14 inches in diameter x 24 inches long. Larger diameter logs tend to be unreasonably heavy, and smaller diameter logs are more prone to falling over.
Species for Oysters: Aspen (Poplar), Cottonwood, Willow, other “soft” hardwoods
Species for Lions Mane: Beech (by far the best), Oak, Sugar Maple
- Paper lawn debris bags to cover totems, and a few pieces of scrap cardboard.
- Sisal or other inexpensive twine, or large rubber bands.
- Sawdust spawn or rye grain spawn. Saw dust spawn is less likely to attract squirrels.
- Plastic cup to dispense spawn uniformly
- A Rake for site preparation.
- Work gloves, etc.



Procedure:

1. Logging should be done during winter or early spring, before leaf out, when the bark is still tight and the tree is full of sap and nutrients. Cuts between log sections (24") should be smooth and horizontal to facilitate stacking. Cut off side branches flush with the stem. If logs are cut while dormant they may be stored under shade for several weeks.

2. Inoculation should occur in the spring during the months of March – May. Begin by cutting the approximately 24 inch long logs into two approximately 12 inch long sections and cut an additional 2" piece from the top of the stack. Before cutting, make a vertical mark (Sharpie, etc.) several inches long at a point where the 24" log will be cut into two 12" long pieces. *Keep track of which is the top and which is the bottom section so they will fit together snugly.*



3. Place a piece of cardboard on the ground. Place about 8 ounces of loose spawn on the cardboard and place the lower of the two log sections on top of the spawn. Next put 8 oz of finely divided spawn (no big clumps) on top of the lower section, and place the upper section on top of that, being careful to align the vertical line on each of the two sections so that the two sections will fit snugly in their original orientation. Finally, place 8oz of spawn on top of the upper section and place the 2" piece on top. Place a large paper bag upside down over the top of the two log sections, and secure it with the large rubber band or twine. Do not cut off the air supply by closing too tightly.

4. In 3 – 6 months, when whitish fungal mycelium has covered the paper bag, or the pieces are “fused” together, you can remove the bag (or just wait until it is deteriorated by rainfall). This is usually the same Fall or following Spring after inoculation.

5. A laying yard where mushrooms will fruit should be well shaded. A dense evergreen coniferous stand is best, as winter sun penetrating a deciduous canopy can cause heating and moisture loss. The site should be protected from drying winds as well as possible. Choose a site that is fairly level, and use a rake or other implements to level it as much as possible so logs will not fall over. Choose and prepare your site with care. Once totems are assembled they are difficult to move.

