

Fun Guys with Fungi

Brothers run mushroom farm in Naples

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Blue oyster mushroom

September is National Mushroom Month, and the Stropharia Mushroom Farm in Naples is a great place to celebrate.

Since 2020, brothers Jor’El and Sheth Schustrin have been growing several varieties of the fungi and selling them at their storefront location, during farmer’s markets and to local restaurants.

“A lot of people look at mushrooms and say they’re pretty, but they don’t know how to cook them,” Jor’El Schustrin said. “Sometimes, we will cook them at the farmer’s markets, so people have a place to try something different. People come from Cape Coral and Port Charlotte for our deep-fried mushroom sandwich.”

Though thousands of mushroom species exist, the brothers concentrate on about a dozen.

Blue oyster and Italian oyster grow quickly and produce a lot of mushrooms. Jor’El Schustrin said chefs like chestnut mushrooms because they have a typical mushroom shape that diners are familiar with. Pioppino, also known as the black poplar, has a nutty flavor that Italian restaurants like to buy.



Co-owner Jor’El Schustrin in indoor farm where mushrooms move through the growing process over several weeks or months.

The king trumpets and black pearl kings are suitable meat substitutes, Jor’El Schustrin said, often replicating pulled pork in recipes. Lion’s mane is a great substitute for things like crab meat, he asserted, adding that it’s also less expensive.

Jor'El Schustrin said reishi has long been known for its medicinal purposes, emphasizing that the farm does not grow or sell any hallucinogenic varieties of mushrooms.

In addition to fresh and dried mushrooms, they sell a variety of salts, powders, tinctures, teas and juices made from their mushrooms.

Jor'El Schustrin began growing mushrooms in his condo in 2015 after hearing a Ted Talk by Paul Stamets, a mycologist who studies fungi. Stamets discussed how mushrooms were being studied for their positive impact on the brain and potential to help with diseases like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's, which their stepfather has. Jor'El Schustrin purchased capsules and tinctures that Stamets sells and helped his stepfather cut back on the 13 pills he was taking daily to only three in a year-and-a-half.



Co-owner Jor'El Schustrin at their storefront where they sell fresh and dried mushrooms, powders, tinctures, drinks and frozen meals. ROBIN F. DEMATTIA / FLORIDA WEEKLY

When Jor'El Schustrin saw that change, he bought blocks of ready-to-fruit kits and taught himself to grow mushrooms on his kitchen counter. He read books and took notes about what was working and what wasn't. It got to the point where there were mushrooms everywhere in his two-bedroom home.

The brothers, graduates of Lely High School, eventually decided to quit their jobs and open the farm. Jor'El Schustrin had been working in film and television production. Sheth Schustrin, with a degree in culinary arts and food service management, was cooking at local restaurants.

"With my brother being a chef and me falling in love with the growing process, I figured we would have a good opportunity," Jor'El Schustrin said. "I saw what the mushrooms did for my stepfather (such as) better sleep and higher energy levels. Mushrooms are pretty amazing. I think everyone should have them in their daily diet."



King Trumpet mushrooms growing vertical. ROBIN F. DEMATTIA / FLORIDA WEEKLY

Their first location was a 1,000-square-foot warehouse off of Linwood Avenue, which was destroyed by Hurricane Ian.

Last December, they moved to their current 2,200-square-foot location, allowing them to more than double their production.

Jor'El Schustrin calls it an indoor vertical farm where everything is grown in bags in zippered grow tents.

The room is kept at 70 degrees, though it's around 60 to 65 in the tents. The process includes hydrating and sterilizing grains such as millet, sorghum, rye or oats, which serve as blocks on which the mushrooms will grow.

Jor'El Schustrin opens a mushroom to cultivate fresh tissue that sits in a gelatin filled petri dish until mycelium or mushroom roots start to form. Those pieces are placed in a sugar-water base until they create a juice injected into the grain blocks. The brothers wear clean suits and control water, temperature, humidity, oxygenation and pasteurization. No chemicals are used.



Lion's Mane mushroom COURTESY PHOTO

It takes about three weeks to get to this stage, and then the waiting starts. Lion's mane can take up to 10 days to grow, oysters take two weeks, pioppino and chestnuts average three to four weeks, shiitake and reishi take three months, and maitake take six months. Most mushrooms simply pop off when twisted.

Being a mushroom farmer is not as simple as people think, Jor'El Schustrin said. "Some chefs have come and seen the process and didn't realize how long it takes."

To meet restaurant demand, the brothers like to have orders far in advance. They also rely on the growing process going smoothly.

"That's the struggle," Jor'El Schustrin said. "I won't know if anything gets contaminated until the incubation process."

Because many potential buyers are unfamiliar with different varieties of mushrooms, Jor'El Schustrin said they not only sell mushrooms but also provide information about how to cook them.

"People grew up with white mushrooms, portabellas or canned," Jor'El Schustrin said. "But when I make Lion's mane, it tastes like a chicken cutlet."

The brothers dehydrate some mushrooms to create powders, tinctures and seasonings.

"All of them are good for the immune system," Jor'El Schustrin said. "Lion's mane and reishi help with anxiety. Oyster mushrooms help with cholesterol."

They also sell mushroom pate spreads and prepared meals that use mushrooms as substitutes for crab cakes, in tacos or to top pizza.

"It's a family business," Jor'El Schustrin said. "I grow the mushrooms, and we use my brother's talent to make the meals." }

In the KNOW

Stropharia Mushroom Farm

• 5385 Jaeger Road #102, Naples

• 239-465-3684

• www.strophariamushroomfarm.com

• Hours: 10 a.m. – 6 p.m. Monday through Saturday

Popcorn Lion's Mane recipe

• 1/4 lb. Lion's mane mushrooms

Wet batter:

• 1 Tbsp. Cajun seasoning

• 1 tsp. garlic powder

• 1 tsp. onion powder

• 1 cup chickpea flour

• 2 Tbsp. cornstarch

• 1 cup Pellegrino

Dry batter:

• 1/2 cup chickpea flour

• 1 tsp. salt

• 1 tsp. black pepper

• 1 tsp. paprika

Directions:

• Tear or cut mushrooms into 1-inch cubes.

• Prepare the wet and dry batters.

• Add two inches of oil to a shallow pan over medium-high heat.

• Dip the mushrooms into the wet batter and then the dry batter.

• Fry on the first side for 5 minutes and flip. Fry an additional 3-4 minutes or until golden brown.

Transfer to rack or paper towels to dry. Salt immediately.

Courtesy of Stropharia Mushroom Farm.