

GARDENING NOTES

(By Mr. J. JOYCE, Landscape Gardener, Christchurch.)

HOW TO GROW MUSHROOMS.

There are several ways in which mushrooms may be grown. But in no way can they be produced so abundantly as Nature produces them in certain seasons—though generally in Autumn—in meadows and pastures. By artificial means, however, mushrooms may be grown satisfactorily. Gardeners who grow for the market nearly all the year round grow them in a heated structure made for the purpose. Here I will not refer to this mode of treatment, confining my remarks to the explanation of a more simple way of producing them at which any person who possesses a horse and keeps him stabled may try his hand. There is no need for a greenhouse or any special structure for the purpose; an old shed or outhouse of any description will answer provided wind and rain do not take possession. Commence by building a frame of boards against the wall of the house about four feet wide and as long as required, say, six or eight feet; two feet high at the front will be sufficient, and slop upwards to about four feet at the back.

Preparing Material.

Collect a good load of fresh stable manure and make it into a convenient heap, shaking it up carefully and mix in a fair amount of sweepings of the stable. Also, if procurable, get the sweepings of a track where horses are being exercised constantly, or, if this is not to be had, sweepings from the public road where the horse droppings are reduced to dry dust. Some road grit is not to be objected to. When sufficient manure is collected, mix all up in a heap, and if dry give it a watering with a rose attached to the can during the mixing. Let it lie for about a week to heat, and then give it another good shaking up, and if any mouldy manure is present give it a gentle sprinkling. Make it into a heap as before (a conical shape is preferable, as it will throw the water off if it should happen to rain during the process). It may now be left for another week. Open the top occasionally with a fork to let out the violent steam. If the heap is found to be very hot at the end of the second week, another good shaking up will be necessary so as to do away with too violent a heat. Having the stuff in proper form, proceed to fill in the frame, giving it a good mixing at the same time, and put away all long litter, using only the short material. Some coarse manure may be put in the bottom if sufficient of the finer is not there to fill the frame well up, so as to allow for settling down. Make the bed sloping from the back to the front, patting the stuff very firmly as the work proceeds. When the bed is finished a good treading will be necessary to make a solid surface. Insert a stick into the bed, and this will be a guide as to the heat. By drawing out the stick and feeling with the hand the amount of heat can be determined; and when a nice gentle heat prevails throughout the bed, which will be about a week from the making, spawn can be inserted through the bed. Spawn can be procured from any seedsman. It is made in the form of a brick, and this brick will need to be chopped into small pieces about the size of a large walnut. Place the pieces about two inches deep in the bed and about six or eight inches apart, covering them over with the dry material of the bed. When the spawn is planted the bed will require a layer of mould about an inch and a-half thick, patted down smoothly with a spade. This will require a gentle watering through a fine rose. The mould used is to be fine dry turfy stuff from a rich paddock, and put through a sieve to make it fine. When the surface of the bed has dried off, it will need to be covered over to a depth of six inches to keep in the heat, with some old material such as the remains of the thatch of a hayrick; also the bed must be kept dark and the covering must be dry material. The bed will require no water until it begins to bear, which will be, if all is

well, in about six weeks. When the picking commences the covering is to be removed and a gentle watering with tepid water given, which is to be continued once a week whilst the bed is bearing. Another simple and inexpensive mode of growing mushrooms is by inserting bits of spawn all over a cucumber frame. The hot bed used for growing cucumbers answers for growing mushrooms at the same time, and when the cucumbers are done the mushrooms are at their best and go on producing for a considerable time.

Good fresh spawn is essential for success. Good healthy spawn, when broken, is found to possess a quantity of white thread-like growth which is the fungus from which the mushroom is produced. When this is put into the manure bed, the warmth and moisture of the bed causes the fungus to run all over it and develop spores, from which the mushrooms are produced. It is not wise to cut the mushrooms with a knife, but to pull them up gently by giving them a twist, and they then leave the soil without disturbing the spores. Leaving the dead stems when cut with a knife is injurious, as they rot and injure the growth of the young mushrooms. Mushrooms should be picked when young. Old ones are not recommended for the table, but they make very good catsup.

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