

# LEARNING HORTICULTURE WITH TAKE HOME MUSHROOM KITS DURING THE COVID-19 LOCKDOWN

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## PROBLEM

Pre-COVID-19 lockdown (2019), we usually organise a mushroom growing practical in the laboratory (lab). After a lab demonstration, students practice culturing mushroom mycelium, spawn and compost preparation. The compost mixed with spawn in plastic bags are incubated in the Mushroom Research Unit for 2 weeks. Once established, students take the compost bags back home to harvest mushrooms. During the COVID-19 lockdown (2020), face to face laboratory mushroom practicals were no longer possible with social distancing requirements (4 sqm per person). We had to live-stream the practical sessions on Zoom to the students from the lab. We were not satisfied with just live-streaming practicals as the students did not get hands-on experience with growing the mushrooms.

## PLAN

During the COVID-19 lockdown, the first author was invited to speak on Nick Kilvert's ABC Urban Castaway series and was interviewed by *ABC Radio National* and *ABC News online* about self-sufficiency and people's ability to hunt, forage and live off the local land. In the ABC Urban Castaway series (Week 3), there was a feature on growing our own mushrooms to be self-sufficient and how this could be an educational experience during the lockdown. Hence, at the end of May 2020, mushroom kits, with established mycelial colony in compost were provided to the students with instructions for care so that they could have hands-on learning experience of growing and eating their own mushrooms at home.

## ACTION

We provided the students with a mushroom kit each so that they could practice growing mushrooms as well as a food subsistence during the lockdown. They could also practice time-lapse photography on the mushroom growth stages (from pinning, button and mature stages). If they did a good job, they could get 2 or 3 flushes of mushrooms (usually three flushes are harvested commercially).

## REFLECTION

The students learnt how to grow their own mushrooms during the lockdown and post-lockdown as this is a life skill that they can use in the future. Live-streamed practicals provided useful information on how students can collect the spores and produce spawn to grow more of their own mushrooms in the future, becoming potentially self-sufficient in mushrooms! In addition to learning the theory of mushroom production, students gain the life skills to produce their own mushrooms at home.

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