

Growing the perfect mushroom

By Richard Edmondson

If you thought growing mushrooms was a simple matter of keeping them in the dark and feeding them dung, think again.

Graeme and Marie Price's Waimate North oyster mushroom business is a complex operation involving lights, air conditioners, water pumps and electric fans.

The mushrooms, which the Prices grow on damp barley straw, need 12 hours of light each day, temperatures between 18 to 20 degrees and 95 per cent humidity to thrive.

"Oyster mushrooms are quite different to button mushrooms," says Graeme.

"If it's too cool, we get slow mushroom growth. If it's too hot, the mushrooms abort."

The Prices got into the mushroom business four years ago after doing a correspondence course through Rawene mushroom spawn supplier Tim Thornewell.

"We wanted to start a business that would allow me to work from home while home schooling the kids," says Marie.

"No one was doing mushrooms at the Whangarei Growers' Market and oyster mushrooms were something that local restaurants couldn't get," she says.

Today, the Prices grow up to 160kg of spray-free fungi a month in their garage which they converted into two misting chambers at a cost of \$60,000.

"We supply all the top chefs in Northland," says Marie.

"As far as we know, we are the only oyster mushroom growers north of the Auckland harbour bridge."

The Prices also dry and powder mushrooms and claim to be the only grower in the country to offer manuka-smoked oyster mushrooms.

They would like to expand their Mighty Mushroom business when they have finished building their customer base and can justify spending \$100,000 on new misting chambers.

"We would like to grow a mushroom that no-one else is doing so we are the only supplier of it," says Graeme.

Installing an electricity generator is also something they have considered.

Power outages in summer can wipe out a crop in a matter of hours, says Graeme.

It can take up to seven days to chill the chambers and get another growing cycle underway, he says.

Despite the challenges of maintaining optimum growing conditions, the Prices have no regrets about getting into the mushroom business.

"When you go in there and there are 40 bags of mushroom bouquets, it's cool," says Marie.

"It's a lot of fun. We wouldn't be doing it if it wasn't."

Mighty Mushroom oyster mushrooms are available at the Bay of Islands Farmers Market.

For more information, phone the Prices on 405 9442 or visit their web site at www.mightymushrooms.co.nz.

Rawene mushroom spawn supplier Tim Thornewell can be contacted at 021 8 FUNGI.



Delicate flavour: Oyster mushrooms are one of about 900 species of fungi that are edible.

Shopping for a good deal

Some Far North shoppers are paying significantly more than others for groceries.

A Northern News survey of lowest prices at supermarkets last Wednesday found shoppers would have paid up to \$8.28 more for the same basket of groceries depending on which supermarket they shopped at.

Paihia Woolworths was the most expensive supermarket for the third time since the first survey 12 months ago with a bill of \$53.97. Kerikeri New World was the cheapest for the first time with a bill of \$45.69.

Other totals were: Kaitaia Pak 'n' Save \$46.58, Kaikohe New World \$47.48, Kerikeri Woolworths \$51.41 and Kaikohe Woolworths \$51.97.

Price differences were greatest for beef mince, tomatoes, broccoli and milk.

Beef mince sold for \$6.99 a kg at Kerikeri New World and \$9.99 at Kaikohe New World. Tomatoes sold for \$4.99 a kg at Kaikohe New World and \$6.99 a kg at

WHO'S THE DEAREST?

Date	Cheapest	Most Expensive
Aug 2007	Kaitaia Pak 'n' Save	Kerikeri New World
Oct 2007	Kaikohe New World	Paihia Woolworths
Nov 2007	Kaitaia Pak 'n' Save	Kerikeri New World
May 2008	Kaikohe New World	Kerikeri Woolworths
Jul 2008	Kaikohe New World	Paihia Woolworths
Aug 2008	Kerikeri New World	Paihia Woolworths

Woolworths Supermarkets. Broccoli was \$1.49 a crown at Kaikohe New World and \$2.59 at Kaitaia Pak 'n' Save. A one-litre Dairy-fresh sachet of milk was \$1.20 at Kaikohe Woolworths, but \$2.10 at Paihia Woolworths.

PRICE CHECK

Items surveyed: One-litre of homogenised milk, 1kg of cheese, one 500g block of butter, one 700g sliced loaf of bread, 100 tea bags, 1.5kg of plain flour, 1kg of minced beef, 1kg of frozen peas, 1kg of tomatoes, 1kg of apples, one crown of broccoli and one lettuce.



Mother's plea for help

A Christchurch mother has made a heartfelt plea for information about her 13-year-old daughter who has gone missing from a live-in South Auckland therapy programme.

Jasmine Lasseter has conduct disorder – a behavioural disorder – and was attending a multisystemic therapy programme to help gain control and manage it. On July 23 she went to bed and hasn't been seen since.

Her mother Shannon says Jasmine has no money, no friends, has not contacted family in that area and has only the clothes she was wearing. Jasmine may also be pretending to be older than she is. She has changed the colour of her hair, tried to bleach it blonde and it's a light rusty colour.

■ **Anyone knowing of Jasmine's whereabouts can call Shannon on 021 0660 906.**



Missing: Jasmine Lasseter has gone missing from South Auckland.

NEWS

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