# CULTIVATION OF MUSHROOMS

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A unit has been established at Gannoruwa Farm by the Horticulture Division to cater to the requirements of farmers who have displayed an interest in cultivation of Mushrooms.

An interest has been evident for sometime among some farmers in the cultivation of mushroom as an agricultural enterprise, the primary constraint continued to be the inability to get the required seed material. This is because the production of seed material has to be carried out in a laboratory by specially trained staff. The new mushroom production unit at the Gannoruwa Horticulture Farm has been successful in filling this void. and arrangements have been made to distribute the seed supplies on a district basis.

The interest in the introduction and popularisation of mushroom as a new crop stems from several factors. From an economic angle, the primary advantages lie in the relatively short period of production (i.e. harvesting 14-21 days) as compared with other crops, and the higher income potential from a smaller cultivation area under normal environmental conditions, a 10 sq.ft. plot can easily yield an income of Rs.75/- in a short span of 21 days, while specially prepared tier beds can yield, over the same period, a three-fold income.

Apart from these advantages, mushroom cultivation does not require chemical fertilizers and insecticides and further more, the crop can be grown even on land unsuitable for other crops. Unused firewood sheds and garages as well as land subject to soil erosion or without proper drainage can be converted for mushroom cultivation by providing some shelter such as a cadjan cover. The basic requirements for cultivation are straw discarded after threshing and some seed material.

A packet of seeds issued by the Department is priced at Rs.10.00 and is sufficient for a bed of 10 sq.ft. A bed of this size can easily provide a yield of 3½ to 4½ kilos.

Apart from the palatability of the product, research studies have revealed that mushroom has a high nutritional value. As a food, no part of the mushroom needs to be thrown away. The protein content is approximately as follows :-

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| Potato, Cabbage, Asparagus | - Mushroom has a protein content two-fold that of these items. |
| Orange | - Protein content is six-fold in mushroom. |
| Tomatoes, Carrot, Turnips | - Protein content is four-fold in mushroom. |

In addition, the mineral salt content of mushroom is equivalent to meat and amounts to double that of all other vegetables taken as a whole. Mushroom is rich in vitamin B and D and besides, has a folic-acid content well above that of all other foods. Mushroom is also identified as a light meal suitable for diabetic patients. It also excels as a high quality substitute for providing the nutrition derived from meat and fish. Mushroom can be prepared for food in a variety of ways and this constitutes another advantage. In particular several preparations are possible to suit the requirements of patients.

In particular, mushroom deserves a primary place as an easily accessible food item for children of low income families in the dry zone, who suffer from malnutrition and digestive disorders.