

What's your favourite fungus?

The One We Slice On Salads

Mushrooms are cultivated all around the world for human consumption. Global production is about 8 million metric tonnes per year, so mushrooms are big business!

The button mushroom (scientific name *Agaricus*) is the most extensively cultivated mushroom in the world accounting for about 30% of the total crop. For large scale production it is grown on composted straw and animal manure indoors where the temperature, humidity and carbon dioxide levels are tightly controlled. This allows large quantities of the mushrooms to be grown all year round. It is widely grown in Europe, America, China and Australasia.

The mushroom is the fruit body, which is formed from the mycelium. The mycelium is made up of long, thin whitish threads that grow buried in the compost. The beginning of a mushroom is called a pinhead; it is round and has a smooth surface. The mushroom then grows out of the compost and continues to mature above the surface where it can be harvested.

Mushrooms are incredibly good for you as they contain a high amount of protein and vitamins, have no cholesterol and few calories. Mushrooms can be included in your diet very easily because they can be added to salads, pies, omelettes, soups and pizzas.

As mushrooms have become increasingly popular, demand for more exotic species has meant that there is a good choice of different types in supermarkets and greengrocers. Other species available in most supermarkets include the Oyster mushroom (*Pleurotus*) and the Shiitake mushroom (*Lentinula*). You may also find the Paddy straw mushroom (*Volvariella*) and a whole range of others.

One you will not find in many English supermarkets is the Lingzhi mushroom (scientific name *Ganoderma*), which is unique in being cultivated for its medicinal value. In China it is used as an ingredient of medicines and is thought to be able to help treat a wide range of clinical conditions including bronchitis, heart disease and cancer.

