

Instructions for fruiting a MycoCats Oyster Bag.

1. Select a plastic container as a fruiting chamber for your Oyster Bag. A good option is a 56 quart Sterilite clear plastic storage tote with top. An important consideration is the container height, which should be over 12." 14-15" is better. .

2. Select a site for your fruiting chamber. The site selected should not be drafty or subjected to extreme temperature shifts. A good temperature for fruiting your bag is between 55-65 F. Slightly warmer or cooler is acceptable. Choose a place that does not get strong light. Direct sunlight is definitely not good, but neither is complete darkness. A dimly lit area in which you can still read newsprint is fine.

In the winter in Tucson, a garage that does not get to cold works well. If your garage gets cold, select a site on a shelf higher up where it is warmer. In the summer in Tucson, choose a place indoors and out of the way of traffic. A back corner is fine. If your home gets warm, select a site on the floor where it is cooler.

3. Prepare the fruiting chamber. A 56 quart tote can fruit two Oyster Bags, but it will be a little crowded once they begin fruiting. A single bag may be best. Add tap water to the bottom of the fruiting chamber to a depth of 1-2". Drill about three holes per side of the container, just slightly above the water level. For each bag, place a platform in the fruiting chamber for the bag to sit on slightly elevated above the water depth. A plastic saucer for a potted plant works well. Cut a rectangular hole in the lid of the container—about 3/4 of the entire area of the lid. Replace the lid on top of the container. Select a towel that can be laid over the top of the fruiting chamber, and this towel must be kept moist. This will insure the inside of the fruiting chamber maintains high humidity.

4. Prepare the Oyster Bag for slicing. First, the top of the Oyster Bag needs to be re-tied to remove all air above the substrate. Loosen the twist tie at the very top, then force all the extra air out through the top of the bag using your open palms to smooth the sides of the bag. Next pinch the entire bag directly above the substrate and twist the bags several time, insuring all air is out of the bag. The plastic bag should be very tight around the substrate after twisting and with none to very little air spaces inside. Finally, re-tie the twist tie right at the spot where you twisted the bag, making sure the twist tie is tight.

5. Slice the Oyster Bag. The Oyster Bag has two large front faces and two smaller side ends. Using a very sharp knife, cut 5 small slices on each of the two large front faces of the bag. Each slice should be about 1/2" in length. This is where the mushroom primordia will form, and subsequently, the mushrooms. Do not cut near the bottom of your mushrooms will grow out and touch the water in the fruiting chamber.

6. After slicing, place the Oyster Bag(s) in the fruiting chamber. Make sure there is always water in the bottom of chamber. Also, make sure the towel that covers the top of the chamber is always moist. Together, these two points will insure that the chamber maintains humidity of around 90%.

7. Using the set up above, you can easily fruit each Oyster Bag, although the mushrooms may tend to be elongated due to CO2 buildup in the chamber. To reduce CO2 build-up, simply fan the fruiting chamber 2-3 times each day to supply fresh air to the substrate bags. Alternatively, fresh air can be continuously added using a simple low cost aquarium air pump. If using an air pump, attached the end to a bubbling stone and lay in the water at the bottom of the chamber. This will insure the fresh air is humidified. Also, if using an air pump, make sure the towel at the top is always moist. If it dries too frequently, you can put the plastic lid on the top of the fruiting chamber to retain more of the moisture, but don't snap it shut tight; you want to allow the air to come out. Maintaining a cool humid environment with a supply of fresh air is key to producing high quality oyster mushrooms. Good luck and have fun! And bon appetite!

For information on obtaining bags to fruit at home, please contact Dr. Barry Pryor and the MycoCats at bmpyor@u.arizona.edu, 520-626-5312, or visit <http://cals.arizona.edu/mycocats/>