

Hotel Chain Sets Up Mini Mushroom Farms

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The three walled kitchen gardens at the Pig at Combe have been made even more productive and unique with the addition of a mini mushroom farm; bringing hyper-local gourmet mushrooms to the table.

When The Pig, a boutique hotel chain with kitchen gardens at the heart of their menus, opened its latest hotel, their kitchen garden team wondered how they could add something new to the food they sent to the kitchen. They approached GroCycle, a social enterprise who run the UK's first Urban Mushroom Farm, to see if mushrooms could be cultivated in their signature Kitchen Gardens.

The Pig at Combe, a honey-coloured Elizabethan gem, is nestled in the Otter Valley near Honiton and has a strong focus on fresh produce grown in its gardens or sourced from within a 25 mile radius. Instead of simply buying GroCycle's mushrooms, Ollie Hutson, Senior Kitchen Gardener, was keen to push the boundaries of a traditional kitchen garden and produce mushrooms too.

"On learning more about the strong ethos at The Pig we wanted to be part of their unique approach", said GroCycle Director Adam Sayner. "Most mushrooms bought in by restaurants are likely to have come from the Netherlands or Poland where they're grown with a lot of machinery and intensive heating of bulk substrate. We specialise in low-tech methods which are much more sustainable, like our Oyster mushrooms which are grown on recycled coffee grounds. "

Ollie is really happy to be able to offer fresh Oyster and Shiitake mushrooms to his chefs inside The Pig Restaurant. "GroCycle have provided training for us and helped us with the set-up of our grow rooms. We started out as complete novices and with good support along the way we are learning how to produce a good crop of mushrooms and keep the chefs happy!" said Ollie.

A second mini mushroom farm has now also been built at one of the Pig's other hotels in Brockenhurst, and the plan is to roll out extra grow rooms at each of the other Pig Hotels in the near future.

"We've always had a strong emphasis on inspiring and teaching others to grow mushrooms in a low-tech way. That's why we leaped at the chance to make this happen at the Pig Hotels- this puts another string to the Pig's already impressive bow of hyper local food production" says Eric Jong, GroCycle Director. "It also shows you can set up growing mushrooms pretty much anywhere. It will no doubt make more people aware of the potential of growing mushrooms."

The chefs are impressed too. James Golding, the chain's Chef Director, talking about what it means to have a mini farm on site said: "for me a mushroom that is grown and picked straight away has a completely different texture and consistency than anything we can have delivered to the hotel."

Through running its Urban Mushroom Farm and helping set up projects like this one, GroCycle have developed a great method and are keen to help others grow mushrooms too. A brand new online course is currently in production and due to be launched in July 2017.

The course will show how to set-up your own mini mushroom farm and make it into a part-time business or as an addition to any existing food growing operation like a kitchen garden, community or Permaculture project.

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