



**Richland Electric
Cooperative**

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JOHN OUELLETTE PROMOTES SHIITAKE MUSHROOMS

By Al Cornell

For most people in the hills of southwest Wisconsin, mushrooms still mean morels. However, with the demise of the large elm trees, getting even a meal or two has become unlikely for many residents.

John Ouellette has come to the rescue of some area residents by offering another choice. Shiitakes present a raise-your-own alternative.

Oh, there is always talk of raising morels, but I've not heard of anyone being successful. Most morels result from a lifelong partnership with the tree that started when the germinating seed had contact with morel spore in the leaf litter. Many trees depend on some varieties of mushrooms growing on their root hairs and helping them import nutrients and water.

On the other hand, shiitakes decompose dead wood and can be introduced to bolts of the proper species of wood.

As I traveled south on County ZZ and approached Highway 14 at the top of Bashford Hill, I saw a vehicle pulling a trailer turn south onto ZZ. I thought if I follow that vehicle, it will likely lead me to John's for the shiitake inoculation of the wood bolts. It turned out to be Bill Carlson, who was joining the crew about to start the process.

John had emailed me, "This mushroom thing started in the 80-90s at the UW-Madison Division of Forestry. A worker from there had farmland in Sauk County next to Dr. Weinstein's land, and they started shiitake production. Dr. Weinstein and I were good friends, and he talked me into learning the process."

In our world of irony, Dr. Weinstein, who had brought kidney dialysis to the UW Medical Department, was terminally ill with kidney disease. In the last year that Weinstein was able to teach the process, Ouellette learned how to grow shiitakes and began his own mission to teach the process.

Soon, wood chips were flying in the air as Chuck Perkins drilled holes into bolts of ironwood. Ironwood and red oak bolts are types of wood that shiitakes can decompose and turn into the delectable fruiting bodies of the fungus. John keeps in touch with timber stand improvement work being done in the area as ironwood is the main tree removed during this process. Some red oak bolts are obtained from stand thinning.

After drilling, the bolts were rolled down the table to where Tom Hill and Bill Carlson used a special tool to inject shiitake spawn into the holes. John Neilson and Aaron Young sealed the spawn in the holes by applying melted wax. Eric Rasmussen kept tabs on the process and selected the variety of spawn to be used.

Within three hours, 70 bolts had been treated and were ready to go with folks who would place them, take care of them, and harvest mushrooms.

John lives in Madison, and Eric is his neighbor there who frequently helps John on this project and enjoys shiitakes from his own backyard. While John lives in Madison, it is obvious that his soul is attached to the Dayton Township property where he and his wife, Sally, spend a lot of time.



**John Ouellette enjoys his property
on Dayton Ridge Road.**



Friends of John Ouellette inoculate shiitake logs at Ouellette's farm this past spring.

Eric drove John and me down the woods road to where there was a large stack of inoculated bolts. The mushrooms require a damp shaded environment. A watering system drew its water from a pond up the ravine. Eric pressed the handle so that water began to spray from the hose. He soaked the stack of bolts that were just starting to show a new flush of mushrooms. John said there is a new flush of mushrooms every two to three weeks, and there had been two already in early June of this year.

Locating a shaded area where water can be used to soak the bolts is a necessary part of the process. Then a little timely attention is all that is needed to produce the mushrooms. The bolts can start producing the next growing season and can continue for up to 10 years.

John also showed interest in our new arrival, the yellow oyster mushroom. It came as a cultivated mushroom from Eurasia, escaped, and is becoming naturalized in the wild. A nearby tree had grown a large cluster, and John ask Eric to collect them so that he could take them to friends in Madison. The yellow oyster comes on quickly, only lasts a few days, and is very seasonal. Therefore, it cannot replace the shiitake production that provides fresh mushrooms for several months.

There are a number of ways to use shiitake mushrooms.





Left: The first step is drilling holes into bolts of ironwood.

Center: Jonas Carlson, age 9, helps out on the shiitake assembly line.

Right: Bill Carlson, John Neilson, Tim Hill, Aaron Young, Eric Rasmussen, and Chuck Perkins are busy at putting shiitake spawn in ironwood bolts.

For example, large ones can be fried and eaten on a sandwich, or they can be used in soups. They can be frozen or dried for future use.

John has been conducting one or two sessions of bolt inoculation every year for the past 23 years. Usually, 10 to 20 people come together for around five hours for that work. He

points out how enthusiastically children will participate. He thinks that having kids on the assembly line actually speeds up the process.

Because of John's devotion to growing these mushrooms, an increasing number of folks in rural Richland County and beyond are enjoying the savory shiitake.



The goal of the Summer Shift program is to shift non-essential electricity use to before 11 a.m. or after 7 p.m., June through August. These are times when electricity use is not at its peak and, therefore, is not as expensive.

When members shift electricity use, they help spread out electricity use during the day, helping to control the cost Richland Electric Cooperative pays for wholesale power.

Little steps make a big difference:

- Turn the dial on your washing machine to the cold-water setting.
- Wash full loads whenever possible.
- Let clothes hang to dry or turn on the dryer before 11 a.m. or after 7 p.m.

This small shift reaps savings for you ... and our cooperative family.



KEEP SAFE WHEN CAMPING

Follow these electrical safety tips

Are you planning to go camping this summer? Because you'll be in the great outdoors, electrical safety might not be at the top of your mind. However, your camping experience will most likely involve electricity in ways you might not consider.

Although your home most likely has safeguards such as GFCIs in place to help protect you from shocks, outdoor outlets may not be as safe, depending on the campsite. And generators—if you use them—require even more caution.

Before you leave

- Pack a fire extinguisher rated for electrical fires.
- Inspect all electronics to make sure they are in good working order.
- If you'll be plugging in an RV at the camp spot, use a heavy duty, four-wire cord with a grounding wire, not an extension cord.
- Your RV should have permanently installed carbon-monoxide and fire detectors, and you should check them regularly.

If you use a generator

- Whether you are powering your RV with a generator, or with a campground hook-up, know the amperage your RV draws, and the amperage available. If you try to draw more amperage than is available, you can cause serious damage to the electrical source and your RV and may even start a fire.
- Know where your electrical panel and major switches are in case you do have a problem.
- Know the rules of the campground. Some do not allow generators; some allow them only during certain hours.
- Be aware of where generator exhaust will blow, so you are not causing carbon monoxide problems for your family or for others in the campground.



- Turn your generator on and have it running before you turn appliances on.
- Always leave a roof vent open when you are operating a generator.
- Never sleep with the generator on.

If you use a campground hook-up:

- Give the hook-up a visual inspection before plugging in. Does it appear to be in good condition? If a campground hook-up appears to be damaged, put safety first and request another spot.
- Bring the proper cord.
- Never plug more than one RV into a single hook-up.
- As with a generator, plug your RV in before turning appliances on.

If you are tent-camping:

- Do not use wet electronics.
- If you are using a tent heater, take special precautions to prevent fires. Use only designated tent heaters, not lamps or stoves. Only use tent heaters in tents designed for six or more people. Set the heater on a hard surface and allow it at least six inches space in all directions. Circulation is important to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning, so keep the tent door at least partially open.

Source: *SafeElectricity.org*

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