

Economic, nutritional and medicinal benefits of mushroom cultivation

[Health & Medicine](#)



Mushrooms traditionally collected from forests and now more cultivated have recently become the products of the fifth-largest agricultural sector in China. Mushroom cultivation can directly improve livelihoods through economic, nutritional and medicinal contributions. However, it gives different types of values for the human health and wellbeing.

Nutritional value

Mushrooms both add flavor to bland staple foods and are a valuable food in their own right: they are often considered to provide a fair substitute for meat, with at least a comparable nutritional value to many vegetables. The consumption of mushrooms can make a valuable addition to the often unbalanced diets of people in developing countries. Fresh mushrooms have a high water content, around 90 percent, so drying them is an effective way to both prolong their shelf-life and preserve their flavor and nutrients.

Mushrooms are a good source of vitamin B, C, and D, including niacin, riboflavin, thiamine, and folate, and various minerals including potassium, phosphorus, calcium, magnesium, iron, and copper. They provide carbohydrates, but are low in fat and fiber, and contain no starch.

Furthermore, edible mushrooms are an excellent source of high-quality protein (reportedly between 19 percent and 35 percent), and white button mushrooms contain more protein than kidney beans. In addition to all the essential amino acids, some mushrooms have medicinal benefits of certain polysaccharides, which are known to boost the immune system.

Medicinal value

Recently, there has been a spectacular growth in, and commercial activity associated with, dietary supplements, functional foods and other products

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that are ' more than just food'. Medicinal fungi have routinely been used in traditional Chinese medicine. Today, an estimated six percent of edible mushrooms are known to have medicinal properties and can be found in health tonics, tinctures, teas, soups and herbal formulas. The medicinal properties of mushrooms depend on several bioactive compounds and their bioactivity depends on how mushrooms are prepared and eaten. Mushroom remove serum cholesterol from the blood stream. Other species, such as *Pleurotus* (oyster), *Auricularia* (muer), *Flammulina* (enokitake), *Tremella* (yiner) and *Grifola* (maitake), all have varying degrees of immune system boosting, lipid lowering, anti-tumor, microbial and viral properties, blood pressure regulating, and other therapeutic effects. Mushrooms represent a vast source of yet undiscovered potent pharmaceutical products and their biochemistry would merit further investigation.

Income benefits

Mushroom cultivation activities can play an important role in supporting the local economy by contributing to subsistence food security, nutrition, and medicine; generating additional employment and income through local, regional and national trade; and offering opportunities for processing enterprises.