Frequently Asked Questions

What's in the package?

Each package contains at least 120 ¼" spiral-grooved birch dowels and live fungal culture grown on organic grain.

Ok, then what are the black spots in the package?

Those are most likely dark-malted barley from spent brewing grain. If the dark spots grow over time, they could be a contaminating mold. In this case, use the dowels ASAP (if contamination is minor) or compost the dowels.

How should I store my dowels?

If the fungus is not yet growing over all dowels, store the unopened package in a dark place at room temperature (under 80º F). Once the fungus covers all dowels, store the unopened package in a refrigerator (but never in the freezer). Be careful of heat-shocking your fungus— remove them from the fridge, and let them return to ambient temperatures before use. Avoid exposing the package to direct sunlight; fungi have little protection against UV light.

How long can I store my dowels in a refrigerator?

This is highly variable. We do not use nutrient additives in our dowel packs, so dowels are generally slower to grow contaminants over time. Check your dowels semi-regularly, but they should be ok for up to a year if unopened and consistently stored in a refrigerator. Mycelial vigor will drop over time, though, so we do not recommend extended storage. Also, be aware that the longer you store your dowels, the more they will soften (as the fungus slowly consume them). Soft dowels are still usable, though, and you can often insert them into logs by hand (no mallet necessary!).

What contaminant growth should I look out for?

Spreading green, blue, black, or pink spots are usually contamination; however, some fungus species (like shiitake) discolor a purplish-brown as a phase of their fruiting process. Some contaminants are harmful to health. Never open a contaminated package indoors, near other dowel packages, or without adequate protection (mask, gloves, etc.).

Can I combine different fungus types in the same log?

We recommend against this. The different fungi species would likely waste energy competing with each other, and not flourish. Also, (attempted) monoculture makes for easier identification of edible mushrooms.

How many logs can I inoculate with 120 dowels?

It depends on log size and inoculation density, but you should be able to heavily inoculate 1-3 logs with a 120-pack of dowels. That said, if you are the set-it-and-forget-it type, 120 dowels can inoculate 120 logs (but with lower success rates and longer periods before fruiting).

Ok, so I have the dowels. How do I match them to a good wood type?

Online research will be your best bet. Numerous cultivators have created tables for pairing trees to fungus, and have made those tables available online. Forum postings can be helpful, but may not be accurate. Book-wise, Paul Stamets' "Growing Gourmet and Medicinal Mushrooms," Peter McCoy's "Radical Mycology," and Tradd Cotter's "Organic Mushroom Farming and Mycoremediation" are all good resources.

I have dowels, and I know which trees they pair with. Where can I find logs?

Craigslist and tree-care services (public and private) are two great sources. Tree-care services or homeowners often have to dispose of logs and chips after tree care, and would be happy to have someone hauling the logs away. In organizing a pick-up or drop-off, be clear that you will likely not want ALL the logs, as some will likely be damaged and/or inappropriately sized. Be careful not to bring home cedar, cypress, juniper, mulberry, Osage orange, yew, or sequoia, as these are unusable for mushroom cultivation.

I still have questions! Where can I send them?

Please send them to mail@a-horizon.ventures. We can try to provide answers, and then update our FAQs.

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