

Wood Chips

Most commonly cultivated mushrooms are wood lovers or saprophytes – meaning they live off decaying plant matter. For growing saprophytes, the gold standard as a fruiting substrate for these species is wood. Most of them thrive on sawdust, wood chips or even logs of hardwoods such as oak, beech, alder and others – the denser the wood, the higher the nutritious value and the better the yield.

It turned out to be rather challenging to find the pure sawdust or wood chips of a specific hardwood species here in Switzerland. I talked to all possible people around me about sourcing the substrate and called countless carpenters, sawmills and communal forestries in Zürich as well as Graubünden. Throughout three weeks, I had become somewhat discouraged. They all only had mixed refuse of hard and softwoods. Since the mushrooms I am growing are, according to the literature, not doing well on coniferous wood, this was of no help for me. After also scouring several reptile dealers and other pet stores to no avail, I decided to take matters into my own hands. I called the forestry service of Zürich one more time and asked them if I could gather wood from a freshly cut beech tree somewhere around the city. My thinking was that the harsh late winter had brought down branches and whole trees throughout the city, and there must be fresh-cut wood available somewhere. For 20 swiss francs, they handed me out a wood gathering license for a property around the Albisgütli. The permit even encompasses permission to ride the car into the forest to gather freshly cut wood left and right from the road.

After loading up the van with as many 1.5 meter branches of beech and elmwood as I could, I brought them back to Toni Areal to find a place that would help me process them into chips or sawdust. That, too, turned out to be harder than imagined. Finally, in an exchange with Dr Ivano Brunner at the WSL, he told me about the large-sized wood chipper they had for their tractor. The gardeners at the WSL allowed me to use their tractor and wood chipper for a whole morning and even assisted me with the work. I went back into the forest early that morning to load up more wood before making my way to the WSL in time. It was pretty exciting to see the enormous powerful machine turn my fresh, moist and heavy logs into fine wood chips. The smell coming from the fresh wood was fantastic. We loaded the freshly produced chips into large