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Fresh. Simple. Good.

What's the Real 'Dirt' on Mushrooms?

White mushrooms should be white. Brown mushrooms should be brown. So, what's with the flecks of dirt on the mushrooms in the display case?



Actually, the dirt on mushrooms is most often peat moss. Most Canadian mushroom growers use peat moss as the 'casing layer' on the top of the mushroom beds. Think of it this way; mushrooms are grown in trays/beds in growing rooms. The trays/beds are made of wood, steel or aluminum. Before each crop is planted, the rooms and trays/beds are sterilized at 160°F (71°C) for 24 hours. That means they start with clean equipment. The trays/beds are then filled with a growth medium called substrate, which supplies carbon and nitrogen nutrients.

The substrate is pasteurized at 136°F (58°C) for 8 hours before the mushroom 'spawn' are mixed into it. Spawn is mushroom mycelia attached to sterile grain, such as millet or rye. It is the seedstock of mushrooms. Spawn is delivered to the grower, in refrigerated trucks, in sealed bags from sterile laboratories that specialize in mushroom mycelia genetics. That means the substrate and seedstock are clean. In the trays/beds, the substrate layer is about 8 inches (20 cm.) thick.

Two inches (5 cm.) of peat moss is spread over the substrate to supply moisture. This is called the 'casing layer'. The mushroom mycelia permeate throughout the substrate and grow up through the casing layer. By manipulating the temperature, humidity, oxygen and CO₂, the grower stimulates the mycelia to form mushrooms on the surface of the peat moss. The whole process from spawning to harvest takes about 14 days.

What's that got to do with dirt on the mushrooms? Any vegetable that grows in soil may have dirt on it, for example, carrots and potatoes. In the case of mushrooms, the dirt is

flecks of clean peat moss from the growing beds. It is harmless. Just wipe it off with a damp cloth or soft brush before you use the mushrooms.

Visit www.mushrooms.ca for all the good news about fresh Canadian mushrooms. And, if you insist on calling it dirt, please call it 'clean dirt'.