

Dragon Gourmet Mushrooms



Roxana Walker is no ordinary farmer. She describes herself as “a geeky scientist who just happened to get into mushrooms.” A chemist by trade, she has worked as an air-pollution specialist for the state for over twenty years. She became interested in growing mushrooms after learning about their uses in eastern medicine. She signed up for a course with Paul Stamet, a renowned Washington mycologist, who uses mushrooms to remove toxins from soil. When she returned home to Sacramento, Roxana decided to grow tasty oyster and shitake mushrooms. She built her own incubation room and greenhouses and, in 2000, started Dragon Gourmet Mushrooms.

A chemist’s touch helps when dealing with finicky fungi that require precise temperatures and delicate handling. The steam Roxana uses to pasteurize the rice straw on which she grows the mushrooms must be hot enough to kill pathogens but not so hot it kills her mushroom spores. Sealed bags of inoculated straw are incubated for several weeks, then removed and exposed to fresh air. The fungi grow out of the bags in search of oxygen, growing into clusters of fresh, delicious mushrooms. Roxana produces her mushrooms in small quantities and harvests them herself, so they have a longer shelf life and a better flavor than conventional mushrooms. You can find Dragon Gourmet’s shitake and pink, white, brown, golden and king oyster mushrooms at Biba Restaurant, Café Bernardo, and other Sacramento-area restaurants, as well as the Auburn and W-X farmer’s markets.

