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## Food of the Gods

*Greatly treasured, the fabulous fungus was reserved for the rich merchants, senators and leaders of Italy and Greece. In Egypt they were eaten only by the royal households of the Pharaohs.*



In parts of the world the tradition of foraging for mushrooms for food is still a lively autumn event as most of the fungi grew around that time. In time tradition got passed on from generation to the next one, and this is how it all started with us.

Theres grew up in Zumikon in the Canton of Zürich and Hannes in Zug. Our fathers would take us up the mountains and we would forage for mushrooms for the weekend. Hannes's father was also a member of the Zug mushroom club and on some weekends was warden of the clubs hut up on mount Zug.

When we immigrated to New Zealand in 1998 we were surprised about how people reacted when we started talking about our passion. Kiwis would have seen all the mushrooms that grow in forests and parks but for them they were all toadstools!

3 years later, after doing some research with Crop and Food we planted the first radiata trees infected with Saffron Milk Caps and some oaks and hazelnuts with the black truffle. We gave our company the name "Neudorf Mushrooms" because we were living on a road with that name and people could find us easier.

The property was more or less covered in gorse and we first had a go at it ourselves but as Hannes still had a full-time job we run out of time and we decided to get a contractor in to slash it down. The best thing we did. After a couple of weeks we actually saw the contour of the land. We started to plant more trees (silver birch, larch trees, pine nut trees and more radiata). All infected with different mycelium (mushrooms).

When the first Saffron Milk Caps fruited (it is a bright orange variety) we made the first attempt to sell them at the local market. It was probably the same as if we had a stall at the Bernese Onion

Market selling New Zealand style Fish and Chips wrapped in newspaper!!! It took a lot of talking and we had to cook some up for people to try. Now 10 years later it is our most sought after variety in the growing season.

Till now we have planted over 2000 trees for the production of 8 different kinds of mushrooms. Some of them need specific trees as they live in what is called a symbiotic relationship. The mushroom (mycelium) which is the delicate and fragile fine web covering the soil under pine needles and forest waste, supplies the tree with nutrients, trace elements and water and receives in return sugar for growth. This is a very important process as the mushrooms are important for a healthy forest. If you cut the tree down the mushrooms will die too.

Most of the varieties we grow are out of the Boletaceae family (spongy under the cap instead of gills) it includes Slippery Jack (*Suillus luteus*), Pine bolete (*Suillus granulatus*), Birch bolete (*Leccinum scabrum*), Larch bolete (*Suillus grevillei*), Painted bolete (*Suillus Lakei*). Those mushrooms are best dehydrated as they keep for a long time and are full of flavours when re-hydrated. In 2015 we harvested about 800kg of them. All hand sliced and dried in our specially designed wood-fired drier. The wood we use for that comes mostly from the prunings of the different trees.

Our product range also includes our own olive oil infused wild mushrooms (we have 120 olive trees), chestnuts fresh in season or sold dried. We also produce a Mushroom & Herb Salt with the herbs and vegetables out of our own garden.

As the *Suillus lakei* only grows with Douglas Firs also known as Oregon pine we "created" another product out of the spring growth of the new tips. It's a kind of molasses and a recipe our parents already used. It was called "Tannen-Knospen-Honig" or we call it Fir tip molasses. Here in Nelson we have a few chefs who use it to glacer duck breasts and spare ribs. We like it over ice cream!

The Saffron Milk Cap is the only mushroom we sell fresh at the Nelson Farmers Market (from April – end of June is the season). People love them as they stay firm when cooked and they have a vibrant orange colour. They are delicious cooked in butter, garlic and a bit of salt on homemade bread or as a garnish on top of Risotto or Polenta. We also started to make pickled Saffrons out of the seconds (broken off or otherwise damaged) mushrooms in white wine vinegar and spices and received a "Highly Commended" at the New Zealand Farmers Market Award this year.

To walk through our forests, which we prefer to call orchards, brings back lots of memories not just for us but also for our children and visitors. In season we have started to have a few educational tours too, which are very popular. We show them that not all mushrooms are toadstools, instead there are lots of them you can safely collect and enjoy and they are important to the eco system of our forests.

But only collect the ones you know 100%!!!!

Like Hannes's father used to say....All mushrooms are edible ....but some of them only once!

By Hannes & Theres Krummenacher  
Nelson

[www.neudorf mushrooms.co.nz](http://www.neudorf mushrooms.co.nz)

