

# Blewits on Organic Material

*Clitocybe nuda* & *Clitocybe sordida*



Wood Blewit (*Clitocybe nuda*)

Blewits are little autumnal treasures of the forests and fields found throughout North America. Once you spot them you can usually fill a small basket when canvassing surrounding acreage. Sometimes, if you are lucky, you can find an area on a forest edge where someone has dumped grass clippings. Blewits love high nitrogen environments so the quickly decaying organic pile is Blewit fast food. The trick is to create such a location yourself, early in the summer, to ensure harvest of large patches in the fall.

There are two Blewit species that you can grow and they both respond to the same cultivation methods. The classic Wood Blewit, or *Clitocybe nuda*, has a slightly swollen stem at the base, cream to pink to lavender to blue colored gills (lots of variation!)

flesh colored spore print, and a cap whose color ranges from flesh tones to blue. The mushroom is fairly dense with a pleasant, earthy flavor. This mushroom can be found in the wild across North America. The fruiting temperature range is typically 45-70°F, but needs the cooler temperatures to initiate fruiting.

The name Blue Leg, sometimes also called Blue foot or Pied Bleu is often attached to the mushroom *Clitocybe sordida*, which is a relative to the Wood Blewit. Compared to the Wood Blewit, this mushroom has a slender but sturdy stem and a smaller, thin cap with wider spaced gills. The cap often has a small knob at the top. This mushroom is most often found in Great Britain in the wild, but has also been collected in North America. As with so many common names, Blue Leg, Blue Foot, Pied Bleu and Blewit is interchangeable with the above two species, but *Clitocybe sordida* is apparently rarely found in the USA in the wild. This mushroom, while not as large as the Wood Blewit fruits quite a bit earlier filling a nice niche while waiting for its blue relative to show up. Fruiting temperature range is typically 55-70°F, so usually late august. With both *Clitocybes*, cook them before eating.



Blue Leg (*Clitocybe sordida*)

Creating a Blewit bed can be as easy as having a bag of spawn on hand while cleaning up garden waste. This is usually a fall project and it can take at least a year to see your first mushrooms. Planting a bed you've constructed specifically for Blewits in the spring of the year will yield much more, and often fruiting occurs the same year as planting.



Wood Blewit (*Clitocybe nuda*) on the left, and Blue Leg (*Clitocybe sordita*) on the right.

The least intensive fall planting method is to start layering spawn amongst the layers of plant material you have in the garden while removing plants past their prime. Start layering the old lettuce stalks, broccoli stems and weeds with chunks of spawn, about 3-4 apple sized chunks per layer. Make sure to not break up the loaf of spawn too much, the spawn regrows faster when left intact. Every third layer or so, add a thin layer of finished compost, just to provide the microbes and small bits of organic matter to hold some moisture. One 5 lb. bag of Blewit spawn will inoculate a refuse pile about 4x4 ft. Water the pile frequently if you don't get rain depending

on the composition of the pile. If you have lots of thick woody material, water more frequently than a pile made of finer, greener refuse. Another very low-intensity method is to bury chunks of spawn (or mushroom caps) in composted hay bales or large piles of grass clippings left out in the rain for over a year. The following spring, knock the bale(s) apart and use it to thickly mulch garden plants.

## Intensive Spring Planted Bed Method

This method is meant to maximize production. It requires that you have a lot of compost and mulchy materials on hand. If you have any compost made from spent Oyster mushroom substrate, you may notice a distinct yield advantage. A good reason to grow Oyster mushrooms on straw! Build a bed 8-10 inches deep layering chunks of spawn and composted field waste (old composted straw, vegetable matter, composted grass and leaves, mushroom compost). You do not want to use finished compost (save that for the Almond Agaricus) and aim for materials that tend to create a flat surface (rather than loose, airy beds such as used in making up Winecap beds), rich in microflora and moisture. Mulch over the top of the bed with straw, woodchips, etc. to help maintain moisture. Keep the bed moist! The beds should not be more than 50 sq. ft. total when seeded with a 5.5 lb. bag of sawdust spawn.

## Harvest

Mushrooms are ready to harvest when the caps are almost fully expanded, check underneath the cap for just a thin rolled cap margin underneath, leaving 90% of the gills exposed. You can leave this mushroom until full, flat cap expansion if you choose as pesky larvae are of little problem at fruiting time, especially for the Wood Blewit. Collect the mushrooms by gently scooping the mushrooms up from the layers of compost. Observe the way the mushroom mycelium is knotted to the substrate; you'll see clues as to preferences of substrate as you trim off the duff for future planting. Collect the stem butts and use as inoculum for your next planting!

## Storage and Preparation

Store in lidded Tupperware containers in the refrigerator, if harvested when mushrooms are not too wet (not easy in the fall!) they should keep for two weeks. Cook as you would any mushroom, the stem is edible, but requires longer cooking time.