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Grounds to Grow

By Susie Iventosch



Cluster of BTTR oyster mushrooms Photo: Susie Iventosch

coffee grounds into edible ingredients for gourmet cooking.

"We discovered a way to use the beautiful fact that we could actually take local waste and turn it into mushrooms and mushroom compost," Velez said. "With the huge global coffee trend we are experiencing, we realized that literally tons of coffee grounds are going into the garbage daily."

Though it may seem like a slam-dunk to get coffee houses to part with their grounds, it was not so easy. It takes some planning and effort on the part of the coffee companies to store the grounds for recycling. Peet's Coffee and Tea was up for the challenge. BTTR currently uses approximately one ton of grounds every week for their mushroom growing effort, which they are able to procure from just two Peet's locations. Just imagine how many coffee houses there are in the Bay Area and you'll get an idea how big this business could become.

"We are excited to be able to add two more value-add life cycles to what was once considered 'trash,'" Arora said. "We hope to revolutionize the standards for resource management in our communities."



Fettuccine with arugula, sun-dried tomatoes and BTTR oyster mushrooms Photo: Susie Iventosch

If the saying is true that "we are what we eat" we might all wake up one day to find we've turned into coffee grounds! Not only do we enjoy drinking a lot of gourmet coffee, but now there is a brand new Bay Area business, BTTR Ventures, that has discovered a way to cultivate organic oyster mushrooms in recycled coffee grounds. BTTR Ventures, pronounced "better", is an acronym for "back to the roots" a phrase that, for two young entrepreneurs, merges the concepts of sustainability, progress, and social responsibility into their budding enterprise.

Nikhil Arora and Alejandro Velez, both recent U.C. Berkeley Haas Business School graduates, attended a business ethics guest lecture by Professor Alan Ross in 2008. Their interest was piqued as Ross explained that mushrooms grow on hardwood and that, biologically-speaking, coffee beans are actually a hardwood. The proverbial light bulb went on and these young men made the connection of growing mushrooms in recycled coffee grounds.

BTTR Ventures is a regular at the Moraga Farmers' Market and the company has been very pleased with the response from the community. They not only offer the mushrooms for sale, but also sell their Gourmet Gardens (home growing mushroom kits) at the market. The kits are a fun way to learn how the process works, and to watch your own mushrooms spawn and grow from inoculated



Gourmet Garden Photo: courtesy BTTR Ventures
(Yields 4 servings)

My family loved this fresh and simple pasta recipe created by Chloe Cascarelli especially for BTTR Ventures. I would recommend doubling the amount of mushrooms, because they reduce in volume quite a bit with the browning. And, since we love pine nuts on this sort of dish, we toasted a few and tossed them right on top!

Ingredients

1 pound fettuccine pasta
1/4 cup plus 2 tablespoons
olive oil
6 ounces BTTR oyster
mushrooms (2 1/2 cups)
3 cloves garlic, chopped
1/4 cup white or Marsala wine
1/3 cup sun-dried tomatoes
1 bag arugula
(approximately 4 cups)
Salt and pepper, to taste
1/4 cup Asiago cheese, grated

Directions

1. Cook pasta according to directions. Drain and toss with 1/4 cup olive oil.
2. Sauté mushrooms with pinch of salt in medium pan over medium heat until slightly browned.
3. Add garlic and white wine and simmer until liquid evaporates, about 2 minutes.
4. Toss sautéed mushrooms, sundried tomatoes and arugula with hot pasta until arugula has fully wilted.
5. Season with salt and pepper and sprinkle with grated Asiago cheese.

INFO BOX

- BTTR website: <http://www.bttrventures.com/>
- BTTR Ventures Founders, Alejandro Velez and Nikhil Arora, were recently selected as finalists for Business Week's list of America's Best Young Entrepreneurs.
http://images.businessweek.com/ss/09/10/1009_entrepreneurs_25_and_under/4.htm
- BTTR Ventures Phone Number: (888) 688-8305
- You can visit the BTTR stall at the Moraga Farmers' Market most Sundays.

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