

FRAGGING

Mushrooms

SCIENTIFIC NAMES: *Discosoma* sp. and *Rhodactis* sp. **COMMON NAME:** Mushrooms, mushies

In this issue's fragging session, **Jason Thresher** takes a look at what is involved when fragging mushrooms, and what care is needed to create a successful batch of these loveable mushies. Let the fragging begin...



JASON THRESHER

Age: 35

Hometown:
Bookham, Surrey, UK

Occupation:
IT manager; owner of Reef Culture

Marine experience:
18 years

Tank size:
24g D-D Nano Cube

Favourite fish: gobies and blennies
coral: zoanthids and polychaeta
other: Pistol Shrimp

Specialist areas:
coral propagation

Mushrooms are a great coral for beginners to learn the skills of fragging. They are inexpensive, virtually indestructible, and have a high 'margin for error', which will allow you to hone your fragging skills before moving on to more difficult and expensive corals. They also come in a wide variety of colours and make attractive additions to the marine aquarium. Mushrooms usually spread rapidly in the tank, but if you have a little stunner that is being a bit stubborn, you can give Mother Nature a helping hand (or blade for that matter!)

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

SCALPEL: The trusty scalpel is used to cut up the mushroom.

CYANOACRYLATE GLUE: It is used in the second stage of the fragging process.

GLASS CONTAINER: This houses the coral inside the tank while the mushroom recovers from stage one of the fragging process. I prefer using glass to plastic, as plastic can potentially leach chemicals into the tank. I have used a ramekin because the size is not only perfect for chocolatey desserts, but can also be used to house recovering mushroom frags!

SMALL GRAVEL OR LIVE ROCK RUBBLE: This will fill the bottom of the container.

NETTING AND AN ELASTIC BAND: I use netting that fruit and vegetables are sold in.

CONTAINERS: As always, it is useful to have a couple of containers to house the corals before and after fragging.

Unlike zoas, mushrooms are not toxic, so the safety equipment used in the last article is not necessary this time, although you might want to wear gloves to avoid getting mushroom slime on your hands.

HOW TO FRAG MUSHROOMS

Fragging mushrooms is a little different to other corals and requires two stages. This is due to the excess slime that is secreted by the mushroom when it's cut up. The slime prevents the



Images left and right are fine examples of which colours are available. Both images were supplied by Jenny Lowman, who will be featuring in the next issue's Hobbyist Profile.

mushroom from sticking to the frag plug or glue, and even if you are able to get it to stick, it won't stay on the plug for long. This is where the glass container comes in handy. Fill the bottom of the container with gravel, or small pieces of live rock, and then fill it with water from your tank. After you have cut up the mushroom, drop the pieces into the container. Don't worry about how they land on the gravel; they will reorientate themselves to face the light if they land upside down.

(My tip at this stage would be to not use sand in the container. Mushroom frags don't like attaching to sand, and much better results are achieved with a coarser substrate.)

Once the mushrooms have all been fragged, place the netting over the mouth of the container, and place the elastic band around the netting. This prevents it from washing away and leaving the fragile mushroom frags exposed. Place the container in a shaded, low-flow area of the tank, and allow the frags to recover.

POST FRAGGING CARE

The mushrooms should start to heal after a few days, and will attach themselves to the coarse substrate in the tank after about 3 or 4 weeks. This is where stage two starts; the mushroom, along with the attached substrate, can now be glued to a frag plug, or some live rock in the tank.

It is worth monitoring the frags every day, as there is a possibility that a piece of mushroom might not survive. If a frag has excess slime or looks unhealthy, it is best to remove it from the container so it doesn't pass on an infection to the rest of the mushrooms. I also recommend running carbon to absorb any excess organic waste that might be produced by the recovering mushrooms.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Mushrooms are probably the easiest corals to frag, and excellent results can be achieved by someone with even very limited experience. Time to try for yourself!

I would like to thank Oisín from Coral Frags UK for donating the lovely mushrooms used in the tutorial. Check out their site at <http://www.coral-frags-uk.co.uk>

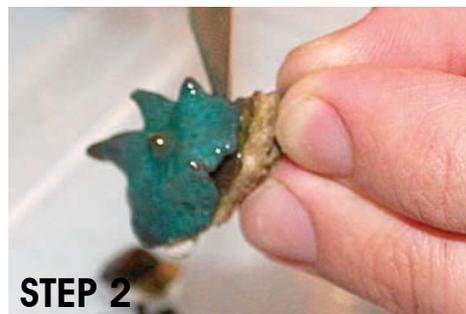
FRAGGING

M u s h r o o m s



STEP 1

I like to have all my equipment close at hand. Here you can see the mushrooms ready for fragging, the gravel ready for the cut mushrooms, and the scalpel. I use the lid of my fragging container as a cutting surface.



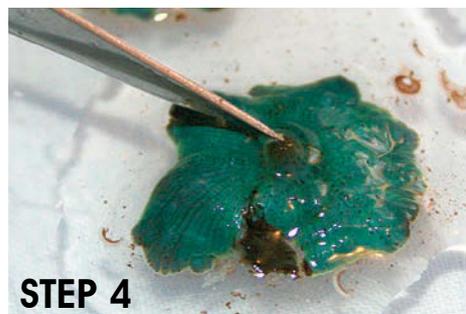
STEP 2

Once you have chosen your mushroom, agitate it a little by pressing against it softly with the back end of the scalpel. This causes the mushroom to close up, allowing you to slide the blade under it for the incision.



STEP 3

I have separated the head of the mushrooms from the stalks. The stalks will grow into a new mushroom.



STEP 4

My tip for step four is to start cutting from the middle of the mushroom. This allows you to accurately cut a piece of the mouth with each frag. Having a piece of the mouth allows the mushroom to heal faster than a section without the mouth.



STEP 5

Here you can see the mushrooms that have been successfully cut up. It is normal for the mushrooms to slime excessively, so don't be alarmed!



STEP 6

It is important to rinse off the slime from the mushrooms before introducing them to the container that will be put into the tank. I now have the mesh and elastic ready to cover the container for protection against other tank inhabitants.



STEP 7

Fill the container with water from the tank, and place all the mushroom frags onto the gravel. Cover the container with the meshing and place the rubber band around it to hold it in place. Place the container in a low-light and low-flow section of the tank for about 3 weeks. Within a month, the frags will attach themselves to the gravel. Now you can glue the gravel to the frag plug or rock.



Habitat Marine Did you have a go at fragging mushrooms? If so, then let us know how you got on: editor@fish-junkies.co.uk