

# Edible mould

Tipp von Esther Kern



Umami is a key word when it comes to packing a flavour punch in plant-based dishes. As a result, fermentation has been a hot topic in vegetarian and vegan cuisine for some years now. It's through fermentation that longer-lasting flavours develop. In particular, lactic acid fermentation – as used in the making of sauerkraut – is now experiencing something of a revival. However, the foodie avant-garde are taking it a step further. They are using koji – an edible mould from Japan – to ferment food. Koji – also known as *aspergillus oryzae* – is used in Japan to make miso, soy sauce, sake and katsuobushi, to name but a few. As part of the new plant-based food trend, however, experts are now also using this edible mould for new creations that are worlds apart from Asian tradition. For instance, there is a type of charcuterie made from carrots and beetroot. The book "Koji Alchemy" by Rich Shih and American koji guru Jeremy Umansky contains a detailed account of how to inoculate carrot, beetroot and parsnip with koji spores. Essentially, the vegetables are cooked, seasoned and then left to ferment with the koji spores in a damp, warm environment for around 48 hours. The koji forms a white coating, similar to that on salami (which also gets its unique flavour from edible mould). Here in Switzerland, there are also a number of professionals who are experimenting with koji in a bid to take vegetables to new heights. The Veg-Alp project masterminded by graubündenVIVA, Jann Hoffmann and Esther Kern – the author of this article – has received a lot of media attention. What originally began as an idea to use Graubünden air to refine



vegetables has since turned into a project whereby koji-cured beetroot is air-dried on a Davos alp, just like Graubünden air-dried meat. The beetroot then develops flavours that have a deep and lasting impact. The beetroot cured by Veg-Alp looks just like dried meat but has a distinct taste, thereby bringing a new component and new flavours to the plate. The use of edible moulds in fermentation will keep us increasingly occupied over the years to come, especially in the area of plant-based cuisine.

*Info:*

*Book: "Koji Alchemy, Rediscovering the Magic of Mold-Based Fermentation" by Rich Shih and Jeremy Umansky, Chelsea Green Publishing.*

*Veg-Alp: Instagram @veg.alp*