
Drug detectives carry off 90-pound mushroom crop

Man arrested, accused of shipping throughout nation

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Thurston County narcotics detectives arrested one man and seized at least 90 pounds of hallucinogenic mushrooms Friday during a raid on a rural property northeast of Millersylvania State Park.

- Inside the three-story home and neighboring barn, detectives collected bags of psilocybin mushrooms that allegedly were being prepared for shipment to customers across the country.

The suspect, Douglas D. Hiatt, 41, has a horticultural background and also operates a business that sells herbs and flowers.

Hiatt was booked into the Thurston County Jail on suspicion of illegal drug manufacturing and possession with intent to deliver. Detectives suspect most of his income came from selling mushrooms, and not from his flower business.

"We had intelligence that this guy's been growing for a long time," said Sgt. Fred Bjornberg of the Thurston County Narcotics Task Force.

The property at 11746 Tilley Road S. first fell under scrutiny about a year ago with an informant's tip to the FBI, Elliott said. Six months of heavy investigation resulted in Friday's search warrant, which detectives served about 9 a.m.

More arrests could follow. Others were managing satellite operations with materials from Hiatt, detectives said. They'd obtained another search warrant late Friday for a home in Tumwater.

In one upstairs room, detectives found 26 pounds of dried mushrooms, mostly contained in Ziploc bags weighing a half-pound each. Up against the wall were shipping boxes and a computer for printing mailing labels, Detective Dale Elliott said.

Mushrooms sell for about \$500 per pound, he said.

Called "magic mushrooms" or "shrooms," the mushrooms have an effect similar to LSD. They can be ingested orally, brewed as tea or added to food. They are popular mostly with teenagers and young adults, according to the U.S. Department of Justice.

"I'm sure some of it was making its way into the community, but it looks like most of it was being shipped," Sgt. Bjornberg said.

Detectives called it a more sophisticated operation than they typically see.

A two-car garage opened to a dozen racks of mushrooms still growing in stinky, humid air. Behind the garage, detectives found a small makeshift laboratory with petri dishes containing spore strains and several bags of material used to grow them.

Another room contained a large pressure cooker to sterilize rye used to grow the mushrooms. On the barn's second floor, hundreds of mushrooms were left to dry on trays in an insulated drying room with large fans and a heater.

Most of the shipments were headed to locations in the Midwest and South, primarily shipped through FedEx or UPS, Elliott said.

Hiatt also sells herbs and flowers through his business, Shady Grove Farm, detectives said. He's a regular vendor at Olympia Farmers Market, where he sells hanging plants and flower bowls, a market official said.

He was arrested while walking outside his home. Police found no weapons.

