

NAPA TRUFFLE FESTIVAL



Oh Mycorrhiza!

North American farmers are learning how to cultivate truffles.

Truffles are a kind of underground mushroom that grow on the roots of particular host trees- especially oaks and filberts. There are hundreds of species of truffles, but the fruiting body of some, most notably the European black Périgord truffles (*Tuber melanosporum*), harvested in the winter, and Burgundy truffles (*Tuber aestivum/uncinatum*), harvested in the summer, are highly prized by top chefs and connoisseurs around the world for their exquisite flavor.

The demand for these black truffles far exceeds supply, commanding remarkably high prices (the black Périgord, for example, can fetch \$1,000+/lb). Unlike the white truffles of Italy, which have eluded cultivation efforts, European black truffles can and have been cultivated for decades-perhaps centuries.

Their production is almost exclusively in Europe, predominantly France, followed by Spain, Italy, Slovenia, Croatia and Australia. But now, thanks to American Truffle Company, founded by Robert Chang and Dr. Paul Thomas, North America we will soon have a viable source for this famous fungus.

“Growing black truffles can be seven to ten times more profitable than growing grapes,” states Robert Chang, Chief Truffle Officer of ATC, who based his calculations on data per acre for chardonnay grapes (*UC Cooperative Extension) and black truffles in full production. According to Chang, truffles yield a profit of roughly \$30,000-40,000 per acre, compared to about \$3,600-5,000 per acre for grapes. This impressive difference is due to the much higher revenue per acre from truffles, and considerably less labor and maintenance costs. “Furthermore,” says Chang, “truffle orchards continue to produce for 40-80 years, whereas grape vines often decline in productivity and must be replaced every few decades.”

These compelling economics explain why in France it is common for growers to replace low producing vines with truffle-inoculated trees. And the timing couldn't be better for California wine growers as they seek ways to diversify their crops, which is why both Napa and Sonoma County Farm Bureaus have hosted several ATC truffle cultivation workshops. Additionally, ATC is working with Napa Flood Control to create incentives for growers to ecologically manage properties in the Napa River's riparian

zone by reforesting with truffle-inoculated native oaks. This practice would stabilize soils, and dramatically reduce erosion and sediment run-off (caused by years of agricultural activities), while providing a viable crop that complements both the wine and food industry. (Todd Traina of Hermosa Vineyards is among the first to sign up for this program.)

ATC also produces the annual Napa Truffle Festival, showcasing the venerated black winter Périgord truffle while bringing together leading truffle cultivation experts, scientists and foragers, and internationally-renowned Michelin star chefs. The festival weekend offers a variety of activities, including seminars on truffle cultivation and cuisine, cooking demos, winery truffle lunches, wild mushroom forays, truffle orchard tours and dog training demos, a Truffles & Wine Dinner at La Toque, and one big Marketplace at Oxbow Public Market.

The truffle orchard tour takes place at Robert Sinskey Vineyards, who planted the first ATC truffle orchard in the Carneros region of California's wine country. RSV farms almost 200 acres of vines organically and biodynamically. Biodiversity is an important aspect of this model of farming, planting hedgerows and cover crops, as well as initiating active restoration and maintenance of wild areas. Instead of using herbicide sprays, RSV employs sheep to “mow” the cover crops during the winter. Since they were planning to hold some land in reserve for the sheep, they decided to plant a “forest” where the sheep can graze while cultivating truffles below.

“It was just an extension of our ‘Perfect Circle’ concept of farming where everything contributes and feeds into other farm processes,” says Rob Sinskey, RSV proprietor/vintner and self-proclaimed ‘Day Dream Believer.’ “Also, it fits well with the stylistic philosophy of our wines. RSV is all about the culinary experience, producing balanced wines that show best at the dinner table. My wife, Maria Helm Sinskey is a chef and cookbook author who uses ingredients from our culinary gardens, bees and animals. It's a romantic notion that we may be able to produce our own truffles as well... and there is nothing better than Pinot Noir and truffles!”

Truffle hunters: dogs versus pigs. The most significant advantage to using dogs over the once-traditional pigs is that dogs don't eat them, as do the female pigs, who seek out the truffles for their irresistible pheromones, which are similar to those of the male pig. Also, a friendly canine makes for a great companion on the

hunt and, unlike a pig, is generally eager to jump into the backseat of a car.

Here in the burgeoning American truffle cultivation world, the foraging dogs are commonly German Shepherds, Labradors, Golden Retrievers, Belgian Malinois and other hunting breeds. In Italy though, site of some of the most famed and prodigious truffle and wild mushroom growing areas, the official Italian hunting dogs are Lagotto Romagnolos, or “lake dog from Romagna.” These dogs who hunt for “black diamonds” are worth their weight in gold, fetching prices as high as \$13,000. Canine scent detection training specifically for the domestic truffle industry is the specialty of Master Dog Trainer and Napa Truffle Festival presenter Alana McGee, of Toil & Truffle and Truffle Dog Company. During the festival, Alana presents truffle dog training sessions and demonstrations.

Moving forward, it is the mission of ATC and its grower-partners to bring these rare and elusive fungi to the forefront of local farming, hence to the kitchens of passionate chefs and the tables of hungry diners. “No ingredient in the kitchen has mesmerized me like the truffle,” says Chef Ken Frank of La Toque (also, host chef for the Napa Truffle Festival). “Foremost, you must start with the very best fresh truffles in season and use them quickly.” Which is why chefs across America are anxiously awaiting the first crop of locally-grown truffles.

*Sample Costs to Establish a Vineyard and Produce Wine Grapes, Chardonnay Smith, Klonsky, Livingston and De Moura

To learn more about truffle cultivation, visit americantruffle.com. And join the fun at the seventh annual Napa Truffle Festival, January 13-16, 2017, find details at napatrufflefestival.com.

Dig truffles? Join in the fun, science and culinary adventures as we pursue the rare and delectable black truffle—specifically the winter Périgord truffle (aka black diamond), which will be discussed, examined, probed, prepared, demonstrated and, finally, paired with wines and feasted upon for breakfast, lunch and dinner at the seventh annual Napa Truffle Festival!

Highlights include science/cultivation and culinary programs, truffle orchard tours with dog training demos, wild mushroom forays, winery truffle lunches at Nickel & Nickel and Davis Estates, a grand Truffles & Wine Dinner at La Toque prepared by master chefs, and one big, lively Marketplace at Oxbow Public Market featuring truffle menu items, specialty food products, local wines, cooking demos, and meet and greet Rico the truffle dog (petting allowed).

Tickets and information at www.napatrufflefestival.com.

***Photos courtesy of American Truffle Company



Rob Sinskey, Robert Sinskey Vineyards proprietor/vintner

Truffle Cappuccino Soup Recipe

By Chef Rick Tramonto Restaurant R'evolution New Orleans, LA

Chef Rick Tramonto was one of our guest master chefs for the 2016 Napa Truffle Festival - presenting a cooking demo and creating a menu for a Winery Truffle Lunch, and contributing a menu item to the Truffles & Wine Dinner at La Toque. Chef Rick shared his delicious, soul warming recipe for truffle cappuccino soup. It's easy and what a great presentation if you serve it in cappuccino cups with a dollop of whipped cream as he suggests. Buon appetito!

Ingredients (Serves 4):

1 tbsp butter	2 oz black truffle, chopped
1 tbsp olive oil	1 tbsp unsalted butter to finish
1/2 lb brown and white button mushrooms, sliced	1 cup heavy cream, whipped
1 large onion, diced	minced chives for garnish
1 1/2 cups chicken stock	shaved truffle for garnish
3/4 cup cream	salt and pepper

Procedure:

In a pot over medium heat, melt together one tablespoon each butter and olive oil. Add 1/2 pound sliced brown and white button mushrooms with one large diced onion and cook until slightly browned. Add 1.5 cups chicken stock and bring to a boil. Remove from the heat and use an immersion blender to blend until the mushrooms are smooth. Add 3/4 cups cream and bring back to a boil, then simmer and add chopped black truffles until it reaches a thick consistency. Whisk in one tablespoon unsalted butter, and salt and pepper to taste.

Top with a dollop of unsweetened whipped cream, and garnish with minced chives, shaved truffles, and salt and pepper. Serve in a cappuccino cup and saucer.