

THE NORTH AMERICAN TRUFFLE GROWERS ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

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Truffles 101-3

Sheila Park's Hoenes

The Harvest Season for Black Périgord Truffle is coming to its close for 2005-06. Cheers! To those of you who had the good fortune to find your first or subsequent tasty "diamonds".

In North Carolina, we have experienced an extremely short and warm winter, which has had an adverse effect on producing orchards. Knowing our previous winter weather history, there's still the possibility for colder temperatures, ice and much needed rains as we await the Spring Equinox. Unfortunately, nature is the one factor we cannot control.

All of the newly planted truffle orchards (called truffières in French – pronounce true-fee-air) along with those planted in previous years, should be doing nicely to date with the mild winter.

Spring will dictate checking up on our orchards to make sure they are prepared for whatever Mother Nature has in store for them during the summer months. Lime applications and irrigation systems are paramount for all orchards desiring a healthy harvest.

Optimum Climate for Truffles

We've discussed, in previous issues, the right soil conditions and the right host for production of the Black Périgord Truffle. In this issue, the factor that we have the least control over is the climate, to which I can only give you specifics.

In tested areas, such as France and Spain, the optimum conditions for the Black Périgord Truffle are:

Annual rainfall: 649mm which converts to roughly 25.5 inches of rainfall

Summer temperatures can range from 60° to 100°. Winter temperatures can get as low as 15°.

Sunshine hours: 1579 hours from April through September.

In other words, warm summers/cool winters.



Let's review the pH balance and insure that your truffle orchard, by testing, meets the requirements for future harvesting.

Check to make sure the balance of your newly planted truffle orchard meets the standard of between 7.2 and optimum level of 7.4. Established orchards (four years or older) should be between 7.9 – 8.1. Several soil tests kits are available commercially and locally. Your agricultural county agent can assist you if you have questions.

In review – soil pH is the measure of soil acidity. The pH scales ranges form 0 (zero) to 14. The pH of 7 is neutral. Values less than 7 are considered acidic, while values greater than 7 are basic.

The availability of soil nutrients depends greatly on the soil pH. The pH range optimum for production varies by crop. At low pH values, typically less than 5, aluminum and manganese may become soluble enough to be toxic to some crops. LIME is used to increase the soil pH. The amount of LIME to apply depends on the soils

ability to resist pH changes. Generally, soils with a higher buffer pH require more Lime.

Soil testing is essential to profitable crop production. We must look at truffles as any other production crop but with higher incentives, i.e., our return for time and effort spent.

Though crops like corn, beans and tobacco are harvested annually, we will produce crops to over exceed their monetary value if care is taken.

Soil testing is inexpensive and effective. It will provide you the knowledge you need to make decisions concerning your future harvest.

Adoption of a Truffle Tree

For those of you without the land, time or resources to create your own truffle orchard, we suggest a look at adopting your own Truffle Tree.

The adopter owns the truffles found in the area surrounding their tree (4m X 4m), their name is posted on their tree and a photo of your tree is sent annually. Your choice of filbert vs. oak tree hosts. Also we will provide a location number and certificate.

Truffles, when harvested can be shipped directly to you or sold on your behalf and a check sent to you at the end of the producing season.

Adoption for the first year: \$250.00

Annual maintenance and care for subsequent years: \$55.00

Adoption and maintenance fees are paid in advance for the first 5 years.

Adopters are encouraged to visit their tree(s) by appointment.

A new Hillsborough, North Carolina orchard planted in 2006 gives you the opportunity to adopt at ground level. 😊

For 3-5 days:

Upon harvest, immediately wash and brush off dirt then air dry. Store on an absorbent paper, such as paper towels or newspaper, in an air-tight box in the refrigerator or store with uncooked rice.

Up to 10 days:

Continued storage in a container with uncooked rice and uncooked eggs in the shell to flavor the rice and eggs. The rice and eggs can be cooked and will have truffle flavor! Or as an option, cover the truffles with olive oil. You can use this fragrant oil for salads & truffle recipes.

Several months:

Once washed and dried, freeze the truffles in either a vacuum package or an air-tight container to preserve their aroma.

Sterilizing:

Sterilize at 220°F for 2 hours.

SEA SALT & DRIED TRUFFLES

Sheila Parks Hoenes

Sea salt and dried truffles are the newest item for use with eggs, potatoes, salad dressings, pasta and my personal favorite: popcorn with truffle salt. Just open some champagne, pop some corn, add melted butter & truffle salt and toast to this new fun idea!

Consider making your own sea salt & dried truffles. Dried truffles can be kept up to 2 years. Current market price is \$25.00 for a 3.5 oz. jar.

Sea Salt is produced by evaporating sea water. The process is more expensive than salt produced via mines. It comes in fine grained or larger crystals. The crystal variety can be crushed in a mortar & pestle or a salt grinder. Slice truffles very thin, let dry completely and combine with the salt.

Celebrate the Season of the Truffle

Ingredients:

Red or yellow potatoes, white fish of your choice, truffles, small onion, light oil, sea salt, pepper and ramequin dishes or small individual serving ovenware dishes. Foil for wrapping the dishes before heat.

Method:

Slice truffles very thin & put a few drops of olive oil on them. Slice potatoes very thin & put in cold salted water. Heat a slight amount of oil in skillet to par-cook the potato slices, drain potatoes and drape the bottom and sides of baking dishes. Next, cut your fish into thick slices and layer onto the potato. Use the drops of oil from your truffles to moisten the fish after placing on the potato layer. Add a truffle layer, then a fine potato layer, a very fine layer of thin sliced onion and a final layer of potato. Salt and pepper to taste.

Fold all potato slices in over the layers from the draped sides. Wrap your dishes in foil, lubricating the top covering the mixture. Bake at 170°C (338°F), sufficient to cook potato and fish in moisture contained, for 50-60 minutes. 15 minutes longer for a dryer version. Internal temperature should reach 90°C (194°F).

Serve with a larger portion of the whitefish and for a true French feel, consider serving wild burgundy escargot. Or simply add a colorful salad. Don't forget the wine!

White Fish & Potatoes with Truffles

This recipe was adapted from French Chef Simon.

Picture not available

Once upon a time, there was a poor but good little girl who lived alone with her mother, and they no longer had anything to eat. So the child went into the forest, and there an aged woman met her who was aware of her sorrow and presented her with a little truffle tree, which she said “grow little tree, grow sweet truffles”. And when she said stop, it ceased to produce truffles. The girl took the tree home to her mother and it freed them from their poverty and hunger. Once, when the girl had gone out, her mother said “grow, little tree, grow sweet truffles”. And it did grow and the mother ate until she was satisfied and then wanted the tree to stop producing truffles but she did not know the word to make it stop.

The truffle tree produced until the yard was covered, the next yard, and soon the entire street, just as if it wanted to satisfy the hunger of the whole world, but no one knew how to stop it. At last when only a single yard remained, the girl child returned home and just said, “stop little tree, stop” and it stopped producing. Whosoever wished to return to the town had to eat his way back through the sweet truffles. They lived and ate happily ever after.....

Noteworthy Items

28 Dec 2005

At a recent charity auction, Christies of London set a new record with a huge white truffle (*Tuber magnatum pica*) weighing in at 2.5 pounds, going for an amazing \$95,000!

20 Jan 2006

Truffle prices are continuing to increase as the supply decreases after a prolonged drought in France. “When the produce is this scarce, the sky is the limit” Gilbert Espenon, vice-president of the French federation of truffle growers told a French newspaper. Prices are expected to exceed 1000 euro (\$1,184.26 US) per kilo (2.20 pounds US) for the first time in France.

January 2006

A new book, “The Truffle Book” authored by Gareth Renowden of New Zealand has been released. It is wonderfully illustrated and informative. It makes for a good read and should be included in your truffle information library. It will be available soon through NATGA.

27 Jan 2006

China is sending ripples of fear through French truffle producers by threatening to take over the export market of the coveted fungus. In France, truffles are hunted by pigs and dogs and fed to humans. In China, until recently, truffles were found humans and fed to pigs. Connoisseurs say the Chinese variety is not only cheaper but is inferior in taste reported Richard Spencer in Paris. The French are accusing the Chinese producers of threatening their national delicacy with a cheap, low-quality version. In France they are mixed with the local variety and sold at a hundred times the price paid to the farmers that find them.

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All contributions to the newsletter are welcomed. Please send us your comments, recipes, or any contributions you may have. As we grow, we need plenty of input!

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