



# OAKLAND TRUFFIÈRE

*La Truffière au bord du feu*

## **About Truffles**

Truffles are the fruiting body of an ectomycorrhizal fungus, meaning that they infect the roots of host trees. While they have been harvested in the wild for centuries, declining production has led to a truffle cultivation industry through the use of planting young trees infected with the truffle fungus on its roots. After planting, production of the truffle may take 7-10 years but this production cannot be guaranteed.

There are a number of different species with differing flavour, aroma and commercial value. The most famous of these is the Périgord black truffle.

## **Types of Truffle**

**Périgord Black Truffle (Tuber melanosporum)**

Is grown predominantly in France although is also found in Italy, Spain and in smaller quantities in Slovenia and Croatia, along with a growing market in New Zealand and Tasmania, Australia. A highly prized truffle known for its aromatic properties, this truffle can frequently command a price of NZ \$3,500 per kg.

**Bianchetto or whitish truffle (Tuber borchii)**

Is also known as the Spring Truffle and is predominantly grown in Tuscany, Romagna and Marche, Italy. While providing an excellent flavour it does not command the same price as the other well-known white truffle *Tuber magnatum*.

**Italian White Truffle (Tuber magnatum)**

From the Piedmont region of Northern Italy, this truffle grows with hazels, oak, poplar and beech trees. It fruits in autumn, is highly aromatic and can produce truffle up to 500g in weight, although they are usually much smaller. The highest priced of all truffles, prices can reach NZ \$4-8,000 per kg with the record price being paid in 2007 of NZ \$660,000 by a Macau casino owner for a 1.5kg truffle.

**Chinese Truffle (Tuber sinensis or Tuber indicum)**

Is more common and is considered to have a bland taste and chewy texture



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compared to the black truffle. Because microscopic examination or DNA typing is needed to differentiate it from *Tuber melanosporum*, the dubious practice of putting some of the *Tuber melanosporum* into the Chinese truffle and selling it at a high price has occurred.

**Black Summer Truffle (*Tuber aestivum/unicinatum*)**

Is harvested between June and November and grows extremely well in Northern Italy, central & eastern Europe and even the United Kingdom. While it does not have as strong an aroma as the winter black truffle, is still valued and can command up to \$1,900 NZD per kg.

**Winter Truffle (*Tuber brumale*)**

Is similar in appearance to the Périgord truffle but does not have the same desirable flavour. There is a concern that this species may compete with the Périgord in young nursery seedlings if care is not taken to ensure true-to-type *Tuber melanosporum* infection on roots.

## **Worldwide**

The Périgord black truffle (*Tuber melanosporum*) is named after the Périgord region in France. Their desirability is due to the unique aromas and flavours it lends to dishes, and for its scarcity.

Descriptions of the truffle aromas that infuse food vary – earthy, musky, pungent are some words that describe this unique fungus. The truffle sits alongside other gastronomic delights such as saffron, caviar and foie gras – such is the esteem of its taste.

Production of the Périgord black truffle has declined significantly. At the start of the 1900's France produced 1,000 metric tonnes of truffle annually, compared to the current estimated production of 20 metric tonnes. The decline in production has further heightened demand and prices continue to increase.

Many Truffières in France were family owned, with knowledge on the location of the Périgord truffle being passed from father to son on ones deathbed. The start of the Great War (and subsequent loss of lives) meant the knowledge of



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where truffles were located was lost. This, along with increasing urbanisation and deforestation meant that the industry has never regained the volumes of the early twentieth century.

Today, 80% of the French production comes from south east France, more specifically the Vaucluse and Alpes-de-Haute Provence region, and if you were to visit Richerenches in Vaucluse in January you would chance upon the largest black truffle market in the world.

More information on the truffle industry can be found in *Taming the Truffle*(2007) by Dr Ian R Hall, Gordon T Brown & Alessandra Zambonelli.

## **New Zealand**

The New Zealand truffle industry was pioneered by Dr Ian Hall, Alan Hall's brother, in the mid 1980's. There were several obstacles to overcome. These were whether there was a demand for such a delicacy in New Zealand, if the truffle could grow in regions of New Zealand and if truffle-infected plants could be imported into the country.

Superimposing climatic maps on France, in particularly south east France, onto a map of New Zealand highlighted the areas where the Périgord black truffle might be grown in this country. These areas however are influenced by the ocean and therefore are cooler in summer and warmer in winter than similar latitudes in France. Alongside climatic conditions to consider was the type of soil that truffles could grow in. The Périgord black truffle prefers a rich alkaline soil – similar to sites, Dr Hall determined, to North Canterbury, Hawke's Bay, North Otago and the Poverty Bay.

Import regulations meant that it was impossible to import truffle infected plants from Europe but it was possible to import the truffle itself. Dr Hall developed his own methods to infect trees and in 1987 two small experimental Truffières were established in North Otago at 45° S and in an alkaline soil. 1987 was also the year that Dr Hall convinced his brother to plant a Truffière on the Poverty Bay plains and Oakland Truffière was established.

Today, Oakland Truffiere remains the leading truffiere and nursery in New Zealand and is able to supply the Northern Hemisphere with its internationally



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renowned truffles.

## **Why become involved in the truffle industry?**

Deciding to become a Truffière should not be a decision taken lightly. A long term commitment is required as it can take at least 10 years for infected trees to begin to produce truffles. However with a well-managed Truffière following careful maintenance guidelines, the financial rewards can be great.

Any Périgord black truffle that is produced for sale in New Zealand is certain to be bought by a local restaurant – that is if a local restaurant can secure supply before the Truffière is approached by a European restaurant. Because New Zealand can supply the Northern Hemisphere in its off-season, and as awareness of this market's quality truffles grows in Europe, demand will continue to be high.