

The Diamond of Our Tuscan Table
“Truffles”
By Lou Bruno

“Whosoever pronounces the word truffle gives voice to one which awakens erotic and gastronomical dreams equally in the sex that wears skirts and the one that sprouts a beard” The Physiology of Taste, Jean Anthelm Brillat-Savarin, 1825.

Brillat-Savarin is recognized as the greatest gastronome the world has ever known.



The truffle is described as a *hypogean fungus*, which means that it is an organism whose life cycle occurs underground. As with all fungus, it has no green parts and cannot gather the nutrients needed for its growth. Therefore, it establishes a symbiotic relationship with the roots of selected trees. It receives carbohydrates from the roots and in return furnishes water and nutrients to the tree via its root system.

The truffle is definitely related to its aroma which is fully developed when its spores are mature enough for release. These mature proportions can range from the size of a pea to a large potato and can form from surface level to as much as three feet below the ground. It is these *micorrhizas* or fungus roots that are not visible to the eye. For this reason they are uncovered by sows and dogs who can detect this strong aroma.

The sows are sensitive to the aroma emitted by a compound in the truffle that has an organic resemblance to the sex pheromone of male pigs or boars. The trouble with sows is that they are quick to eat the truffles; however, they do not need any training.

Most truffle hunters prefer dogs, they also have an acute sense of smell, but they do not eat the truffles and are satisfied with a mere morsel of bread upon discovery. Dogs however, have to be trained.

On our Truffle hunt we use “Asia” the wonder dog, all of our attempts at truffle hunting at The Tuscan Table Cooking School have yielded 1 to 2 kilos of truffles.

The ethereal aroma of a truffle is described as a combination of musk, nuts and ozone. It is also reminiscent of a perfume that smells of wood and dampness.

Truffles are basically categorized as white or black. The finest is the white truffle which comes principally from Northern and Central Italy and has sold as high as \$6,000.00 per pound, but averages about \$1,000.00 per pound. The most desirable black is the Perigord truffle whose origins are in France and the market price is usually \$500.00 to \$1,000.00 per pound.

All truffles are seasonal and best eaten fresh. They do not preserve well. and are the black Summer Truffle. I have sampled most of the varieties of truffles and have found this to be true. However, those sold as Salsa Tartufi in olive oil seem to have a somewhat fresh flavor. The other supplement that bodes well is extra virgin olive oil that has been infused with either black or white truffles. Truffle powder is also an adequate enhancer.



There is definitely no substitute for a freshly sliced white or black truffle on simply prepared food.

The truffles we hunt at the Tuscan Table Wine and Cooking School are *Taurtufo Estivo*. After the hunt, a class is given in preparing and using truffles, then we sit down to an afternoon repast replete with truffles. Our recipes that we use at the School are classic presentations (Brouillade and Tournedos), regional specialties (Tajarin all 'Albese and Fagottini) and traditional presentations (Risotto and Farro) of the elusive white and black truffle.



Truffles are among the most expensive foods of the world. They have a place in gastronomy alongside caviar, saffron, foie gras and the finest of wines.

This may re-iterate what Brillat-Savarin said in one of his famous aphorisms: “Tell me what you eat, and I shall tell you what you are.”

Recipes

Fagottini al Tartufo

Bundle of Chicken with Truffles

Ingredients:

- 1 lb boneless – skinless chicken breasts, cut into thin, one inch strips
- 2 tbsp white truffle flour
- 1 box puff pastry
- 4 oz heavy cream
- 2 oz unsalted butter (1/2 stick), plus butter for baking tray
- ½ cup dry white wine
- 1 small black truffle, shaved
- 1 oz white truffle oil
- 1 egg (beaten)

Procedure:

Coat the chicken pieces lightly with white truffle flour. Melt butter in a sauté pan, sauté chicken strips to seal. Add salt and pepper to taste and deglaze with wine. Add cream and sauté until sauce has consistency of thick cream. Remove from heat and add ½ the truffle.

Mix well and allow to cool.

The puff pastry is then cut into 6 inch squares. Place chicken mixture and one thin slice from remaining truffle in center of pastry. Then seal the little pies (fagottini) by bringing the corners together and brushing with the beaten egg.

Place the pies on a buttered baking tray in a preheated 350 F oven for about 10 to 12 minutes; they should be a golden brown. Serve each covered with the remaining sauce.

Serves 4

See www.tuscantable.com for additional recipes