

## OREGON TRUFFLES AND THE OREGON TRUFFLE FESTIVAL



| BY TRACY ELLEN BEARD

Truffles are among the world's most coveted culinary delicacies. These delightful treasures are a form of mycorrhizal fungus that grows and develops underground in an interdependent relationship with tree roots; truffles are the “fruit” of these fungi. For years, only truffles discovered in Europe received glorious notoriety, but today four distinct species of native truffles from Oregon are recognized for their culinary value.

The four native truffles in Oregon are the Oregon Winter White Truffle (*Tuber oregonense* available January - April), the Spring White Truffle (*Tuber gibbosum* found June - July), the Oregon Black Truffle (*Leucangium carthusianum* harvested October - July), and finally the Oregon Brown Truffle (*Kalapuya brunnea* available September - January). Along with these delicious prizes, a few European varieties have successfully been cultivated in Oregon: the Périgord Black Truffle, originally from Burgundy, France, and the “white” Bianchetto truffle, typically found in Italy. Although considered a white truffle, the Bianchetto truffles are unique in the wild and can be brown, orange, tan, black, or a variation of these colors.

People used pigs with sensitive noses to hunt truffles in the early days. However, over the years, truffle hunters found that certain dogs had just as good of a sense of smell. These hunters now use successfully trained dogs to find these little gems. Taking a truffle away from one of these pups is much easier than taking it from a 300–700-pound domestic

hog. Without truffle dogs, there would be no Oregon truffle industry.

The use of truffle dogs was in response to the harmful raking practices which crushed and broke the truffles and destroyed the forest floor. The dogs, trained to determine which truffles are ripe and ready to harvest, can smell the ripe ones and leave the others so they can continue to develop.

The Oregon Truffle Festival, founded in 2006 by Leslie Scott and Dr. Charles Lefevre, introduced trained dogs to harvest truffles in Oregon. Dogs were essential to authenticating the value and quality surrounding Oregon's native truffles, and now well-known chefs in Oregon feature them in their kitchens. The Truffle Festival is a series of dinners, tasting events, and a marketplace highlighting Oregon truffles' use. The festival events support the industry by harvesting truffles, providing education, and creating a platform to promote these delicacies. I recently attended the Truffles and Bubbles Sparkling Dinner at Domaine Willamette.

The dinner comprised four courses prepared by Executive Chef DJ MacIntyre. Purposefully paired with one of Domaine Willamette's sparkling wines or pinot noirs, each dish was artfully prepared and extremely tasty.

Dinner began with a welcome pour of 2018 Méthod Traditionnelle Brut. The first course, Truffle Chawanmushi, followed the Brut. This dish consisted of a bowl of Dungeness crab

with tamari, black fungus, beech mushroom, shio koji, and scallion topped with black truffle, arrived with a 2018 Méthod Traditionnelle Blanc De Blanc. The Chicken Oysters, with white truffle crème, baby new potatoes,

trumpet mushrooms, watercress, sun-dried tomato, and artichoke, tasted fabulous with a 2017 Elton Self-Rooted Pinot Noir. Third, the Petite Filet Mignon with a truffle demi-glace paired with a 2018 Bernau Estate Pinot Noir. Finally, a 2018 Méthod Traditionnelle Brut Rosé paired with a Black Truffle-Infused Hazelnut and Chocolate Entremet finished the dinner.

This dining extravaganza was a spectacular way to highlight Oregon truffles. Truffles and bubbles are an exquisite pairing, but truffles and pinot noir is a match made in heaven. ♦

