

# A guide to using Australian grown French Black Truffles (*Tuber melanosporum*)



## Buying Truffles

Every season the price for truffles is set by export market prices, the local demand and quantities purchased. There are also variations in grading that affect the price.

Truffle is sold by the gram. The truffle will always have a small corner sliced to ensure that they're ripe and black inside, a quality guarantee. Most growers/suppliers will be happy to cut a portion from a larger truffle if your order is for a few hundred grams, but if you're after an intact truffle for appearance, here's a guide to truffle sizes and costs.

- A 20 gram truffle is about the size of a squash ball.
- A 50 gram truffle is about the size of a large hen egg.
- A 100 gram truffle is about the size of a tennis ball.
- A 200 gram truffle is about the size of an emu egg.

Australia's fresh truffle season is from late May to early August. The season start and length varies from the east to west coast and Tasmania.

## Serving quantities

- A minimum serving for an entree plate would be 3 gm. (at \$2.50/gm that's \$7.50 a serve).
- A minimum serving for a main plate would be 5 gm. (at \$2.50/gm that's \$12.50 a serve)

## Serving Truffles

With such a young industry, Australia has yet to develop a 'truffle culture'. How to best introduce truffles to new customers therefore becomes important. The experience of seeing and smelling fresh truffle on the plate, means that simpler dishes work well

whereas the subtleties can be lost in complex dishes. This becomes important in planning a degustation dinner for example.

Our methods of serving truffles draw on European experience. There, when handled at the table, white cotton gloves are often used. If adding truffle as a premium to a dish, they feel it's also appropriate to let the customers decide on the quantity, by weighing the truffle (before and after shaving).

If you are shaving truffle, they should be shaved as thinly as possible, as the greater the surface area exposed, the greater the aroma is from the truffle serving.

Shaved truffles show off the texture and marbling of slices, while microplanes again increase the surface area and the aroma. Both are economical ways to serve truffle. Julienned or adding small whole truffles can also be an option.

## Adding truffles to your menu

Truffles go with anything as they are a flavour enhancer (they contain glutamic acid) and have the 'umami', or savoury taste. They go well with simple dishes involving eggs, mushrooms, chicken, pasta, risotto, potatoes and root vegetables, Jerusalem artichokes and celeriac. One rule of thumb is that truffles have a great affinity for fats, and work with almost any fats, which retain the aroma. Truffled butter is one example.

## Storing Truffles

Truffles are best stored in the refrigerator in a large jar, each wrapped in a paper towel to prevent them getting wet.

Truffles lose moisture (and therefore weight and aroma) continually.

Don't be concerned if they grow a little white mould, just brush it off under running cold water and dry the truffle before replacing it, wrapped, in the fridge.

If you store the truffles with fresh eggs (any eggs) in a large jar, after a day the yolks will be infused with the truffle aroma. They are then excellent coddled, used in omelettes, scrambled, or for making sauces and dishes that can be lightly cooked.

Truffles continue to lose their aroma following harvest and are best used within 3 weeks. Truffle stored as suggested above will keep longer but the aroma will continue to decline.

Truffles can be preserved by snap freezing (minus forty deg.C), but will only have a fraction of the aroma of fresh truffle. They must then be kept and used/shaved still frozen as they become rubbery on thawing.

Remember, while you can add truffle to oils, the fresh truffle will only last for a short period, even if refrigerated. Commercial truffle oil is a synthetic aroma and really does not taste anything like fresh truffle. Often small dried pieces of truffle are added to these chemical flavoured oils for appearance.

Truffles are a seasonal produce and their availability is to be welcomed each winter. Of course they are best enjoyed fresh.

*Truffle shavers are available from the Festival website.  
[www.trufflefestival.com.au](http://www.trufflefestival.com.au)*

# On speaking about Australian grown French Black Truffles

(*Tuber melanosporum*)



**Because truffles are relatively new to our region, we've got almost no 'truffle culture' that tells us how to use them.**

They have until now been considered as an expensive addition exclusively for fine dining. Now that we have fresh local truffle, they can be used in wider range of dishes. That means there will be lots of questions that you'll be asked by new-to-truffles customers. Here's a quick cheat sheet that you can draw some facts from so you'll soon sound like an expert!

## **Truffle history, myth and magic**

Truffles have been eaten for centuries - remains of truffle have been found in stone age middens and they were embraced by the Greeks and Romans. Aristotle declared them an aphrodisiac and Pythagoras agreed.

The Greeks thought they were caused by lightning and thunder, and because they grow underground saw them as seedlings of the Gods, warts of the earths, the spawn of sorcerers and witches.

We have the first practical truffle recipes from Apicius of Rome, in the 4th century AD. Pliny, who documented the destruction of Pompeii also wrote about them.

The Church of the Middle Ages was outraged by attention to truffles and spoke against them. You can imagine why, they were black, with no visible link to the tree, and they were ripe in the dead of winter when all else was dormant and hibernating.

Yet, they had an irresistible aroma and were considered an aphrodisiac. Dangerous stuff indeed! Sermons were preached against truffles from the pulpit, they were clearly the stuff of sorcerers.

## **Truffles make a comeback**

The truffle returned to favour in the houses of the rich during the Renaissance. The church, always pragmatic, wrote about them in the 15th century in a volume called 'Of Permissible Pleasures'. So they were allowed back on the menu but they were still considered mysterious and magical. Rasputin recommended truffles to the Tsar for his blood and to improve the Imperial bloodline. Napoleon ate truffle for strength in battle, and in bed with his fiery Josephine.

## **Food writing on truffles**

In the 19th Century, Alexander Dumas said "to tell the story of the truffle is to tell the history of world civilisation". The influential French writer Brillat-Savarin said 'the truffle is not a positive Aphrodisiac, but it may under certain circumstances, render women more affectionate and men more amiable'. You can pass that on!

Italian composer Rossini was an excellent cook and loved truffles, he gave his name to the famous truffle dish, Tournedos Rossini. Rossini admitted "I have wept three times in my life; when my first opera failed, the first time I heard Paganini play the violin, and when a truffled turkey fell overboard at a boating picnic."

The tie to music is strong and the black truffle has been referred to as the diamond of the kitchen and the Mozart of truffle varieties.

## **What does truffle smell like?**

You'll now as you serve it, but explaining the aroma is a lot harder, but then, can you describe the aroma of garlic and other exotic spices?

We make an attempt by saying, "what do you smell when you open the spice cupboard and sniff?" Isn't it a bit like a crushed, unpeeled garlic clove? Old socks? Saddles? It certainly has an

aroma of damp leaves and earth (they're found in the soil around oak leaves). Sweet compost? Forest floor? Then there's something floral – musty and sweet? Perhaps lilies for the way the smell penetrates, and roses for sweetness?

The main aroma, has been isolated by chemists and synthesised, and now fools everyone as 'Truffle Aroma', but when compared to a fresh truffle, it's really limited. If you see truffle oil, even with bits of real dried and sterilized truffle in it, the label will say 'contains Truffle Aroma' tastes nothing like fresh truffle. You can make oils with fresh truffle but it has a short storage life.

## **What does it taste like?**

Like many exotic flavours, it can be an acquired taste. Generally nutty, but taste is 90% the aroma. Truffles contain glutamic acid so they are a flavour enhancer, hence they will improve any food. Tastes are described as either sweet, sour, bitter, salty or umami (the savoury taste), truffle is umami.

## **Truffles in Australia**

Truffles grow underground from truffle 'mycorrhiza' that is applied as an infection to the roots of host trees, commonly oaks and hazelnuts. Truffles may appear 4-5 years, but may take longer. They're grown in every State and Territory (except the NT), and there are about 150 growers. They are harvested May to August using trained dogs. In Capital Country there are around 30 growers, many with young trees still to produce. This will make Canberra a major truffle centre, and with our great chefs becoming confident in using them, we'll be a major food tourism winter destination.

**Remember, fresh is best and supports your local grower!**

More? [www.trufflefestival.com.au](http://www.trufflefestival.com.au)