

EUREKA

A Truffle Revolution Comes to Wine Country

PHOTOS AND ARTICLE COURTESY OF NAPA VALLEY TRUFFLE FESTIVAL



For the longest time, Americans have savored the coveted truffles harvested in European countries. Now, the elusive black truffle is embarking on a revolution here on our very own culinary turf. Thanks to American Truffle Company™'s founders, Robert Chang and Dr. Paul Thomas, 'black diamonds' are now being cultivated in truffle orchards around the country.

Chief Truffle Officer Robert Chang tasted his first truffle in 2003 at an Italian trattoria in Munich, Germany, where he ordered a simple preparation of tagliatelle pasta tossed with butter and topped with fresh shaved black truffles. It rocked his world. "It was love at first bite," he said. Wanting to know everything about this incredible food—what, where and, most importantly, how to



grow them, he did some research and found Dr. Paul Thomas, one of the world's leading mycologists at the forefront of truffle cultivation. They met in England, Dr. Thomas' home turf, and talked truffles-for hours. Dr. Thomas was already working with truffle growers in Europe with plans to expand. Why not North America?

In 2007 they launched the American Truffle Company™, focusing on the winter Périgord and summer Burgundy—the two most highly sought black truffles of the culinary world—and last year, Eureka! They harvested their first truffle right here in wine country. With orchards now spanning from the west coast to New Jersey in the east, as well as throughout 25 countries on four continents, they're expecting to have a booming North American truffle business.



10TH ANNUAL NAPA TRUFFLE FESTIVAL

To build awareness of black truffles, in 2010, Robert launched the Napa Truffle Festival. That first year, people thought it was a chocolate event. Now in its tenth year, the festival presents a multitude of activities, including a seminar on the science/business of truffle cultivation for potential growers, and engaging, interactive programs where people can see, taste, and evaluate various species of truffles. There are also wild mushroom forays in a local forest, truffle orchard tours with dog training demos at Robert Sinskey Vineyards Truffle Orchard, and extraordinary culinary offerings prepared by Michelin star/master guest chefs from around the world, including cooking demos, two Winery Truffle Lunches (this year hosted by Del Dotto Vineyards and Raymond Vineyards) and a Truffles & Wine Dinner at La Toque. The festival weekend finishes on Monday, January 20 (Martin Luther King Jr Day), with a grand finale (free) Marketplace at Oxbow Public Market that gives the public an opportunity to see cooking demos, meet the truffle dogs, purchase truffle dishes à la carte and buy fresh truffles to take home (recipes included).

THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT TRUFFLES... THE FUNGI KIND

Truffles are an underground mushroom that grow on the roots of certain trees. There are thousands of species of truffles, but the most prized are the European Périgord black truffles (aka black diamonds), primarily known for their exquisite flavor. Because they are rare, they command exceedingly high prices; CBS News "60 Minutes" named them: The Most Expensive Food in the World.

The dazzling, irresistible aroma of truffles has captivated humans for centuries. Their lore is mythical, filled with mystery and superstition. Ancient Egyptians thought truffles sprang from the ground where the gods struck

lightning bolts and devoured these godly gifts coated in goose fat. The Greeks and Romans used truffles for therapeutic purposes, believing they provided eternal health to the body and soul. In the middle

ages, the church condemned their exotic aroma as the creation of the devil, dubbing them 'witch's fare.' Thanks to King Louis XIV, truffles made a comeback during the Renaissance as a culinary delicacy and a darling of the noble class.

According to legend, truffles were discovered by a farmer who observed his pig digging the subterranean mushroom up from the root of a tree. Truffles emit a scent similar to the sex pheromone found in male pigs, which drives the female pigs absolutely wild with desire. For years, sows were used for hunting truffles, but extracting them from their eager mouths proved treacherous, causing many hunters to lose a digit or two. Today, dogs are used for the hunt—by far, a more affable and obedient alternative.

FOR MORE INFORMATION
www.napatrufflefestival.com // www.americantruffle.com

TAGLIATELLE PASTA with FRESH BLACK TRUFFLES

BY MICHELIN-STARRED CHEF KEN FRANK, OWNER / CHEF OF LA TOQUE

INGREDIENTS (SERVES 1-4)

- 1/2 lb lardons, cut in 1/2" cubes (25-30 cubes) blanched first for 2-3 minutes
- 1/2-1 cup mushroom broth (can use vegetable broth, chicken broth or, in a pinch, water)
- 2 eggs (preferably ones that have been stored with the truffles), beaten
- Parmesan cheese
- 1/2 lb fresh tagliatelle pasta
- Sea salt
- 1 fresh black truffle (approximately 2 oz)



DIRECTIONS: Sauté lardons for about 3-4 minutes in a frypan until crispy on the outside. Add broth and swirl pan to deglaze. Add egg and swirl pan again to mix ingredients. Place fresh pasta in boiling water and cook until just al dente, drain and add to the pan. Coarsely grate Parmesan cheese into the pan and mix all of the ingredients together. Add salt to taste and top with shavings of fresh black truffles.



Chef Ken Frank is the official host chef of the annual Napa Truffle Festival. Each year, he helps select the master guest chefs and provides his beautiful La Toque restaurant as the venue for the festival's signature Truffles & Wine Dinner. Widely considered the top truffle chef of North America, Chef Ken holds the distinct honor of being the first, and so far the only, American chef invited to participate in the Fiera Internazionale Tartufo Bianco D'Alba, the world-renowned Annual White Truffle Festival in Alba, Italy. He considers this one of his favorite and most user-friendly truffle recipes.