

You can enjoy truffles without going to Europe

By Irene S. Levine, Special to Tribune Newspapers | December 29, 2010

If you've ever tasted white truffles in Italy or black truffles in France, the memories of those dishes linger. At prices running as high as \$2,000 a pound, white truffles are among the world's most exotic and expensive delicacies. But you don't have to cross the Atlantic to savor these decadent fungi, which are alleged to be aphrodisiacs.

Mycologist Charles Lefevre estimates that 20 tons of truffles are imported annually. Given the financial stakes, interest in cultivating them domestically is booming too. As a result, three truffle festivals are held stateside, in Oregon, California and North Carolina.

The Pacific Northwest is recognized as the premiere truffle-growing region outside of Europe. Now in its sixth year, the Oregon Truffle Festival is the granddaddy of the group. Started by Lefevre and Leslie Scott, it is scheduled to take place Jan. 28-30 in Eugene and will feature three tracks: one for growers, one for cooks and one for training dogs learning to hunt for truffles underground.

The festival's Grand Truffle Dinner features five courses prepared by celebrated chefs, paired with Oregon wines. More than 800 people attended the festival last year; some tickets remain for the January event.

Napa, Calif., held its first truffle festival in December with culinary seminars, cooking classes and a truffle orchard tour excursion. One of the event's highlights was a six-course truffle dinner cooked by Michelin-starred chefs.

The next Napa festival is scheduled for January 2012, to coincide with chef Ken Frank's annual all-truffle menu at La Toque in Napa. Frank's next truffle menu begins Jan. 7 and continues through March.

The third annual National Truffle Fest will be held March 3-6 at the Grand Bohemian Hotel in Asheville, N.C. With sessions aimed at cultivators and food enthusiasts, it highlights the growing U.S. truffle industry.