



TUBER MAGNATUM  
the white truffle from the Italian Piedmont

Truffles are thus an integral part of the web of animal and plant life in a forest. The Perigord truffle thrives on the roots of oak trees. It is cultivated in Europe by planting groves of inoculated oak trees on calcareous terrain known to favour the truffle symbiosis. Considerable success has been achieved with this method in limited areas of France but there

remains the problem of finding and harvesting truffles.

Jean Pagnol in his charming and practical book on truffle culture, 'La Truffe', talks of the use of pigs and dogs to root out these treasures but he also mentions three other more esoteric methods for those not fortunate enough to possess a truffle hound. He explains that you can find truffles by sound. When one is above a truffle a change in resonance can be heard when one taps the ground. He remarks that this requires a very well trained ear! Another method is to go out after a rain shower; as the ground dries out it will tend to crack just above the truffle giving the clue as to where to dig. Finally the truffle hunter can get clues from swarms of truffle flies. The trick is to get to the truffle before they do. Every truffle hunter has a favourite tool for extracting truffles, usually some kind of small rake or cultivator.

Truffle hunters in North America do not have this wealth of practical experience. They tend to rely on their knowledge of mycorrhizal relationships combined with the time-honoured method of grovelling about in the dirt. This meets with limited success. On a recent truffle hunting outing in the Gatineau hills, four avid hunters failed to turn up one specimen. However, one of the party had found a false truffle the day before in a Quebec City park. It was perched on the branch of a tree! He grabbed it and rushed it back to the lab for identification without a thought for the squirrel who would return later to retrieve her gourmet cache.