

Unearthed: A Culinary Introduction to Oregon Truffles

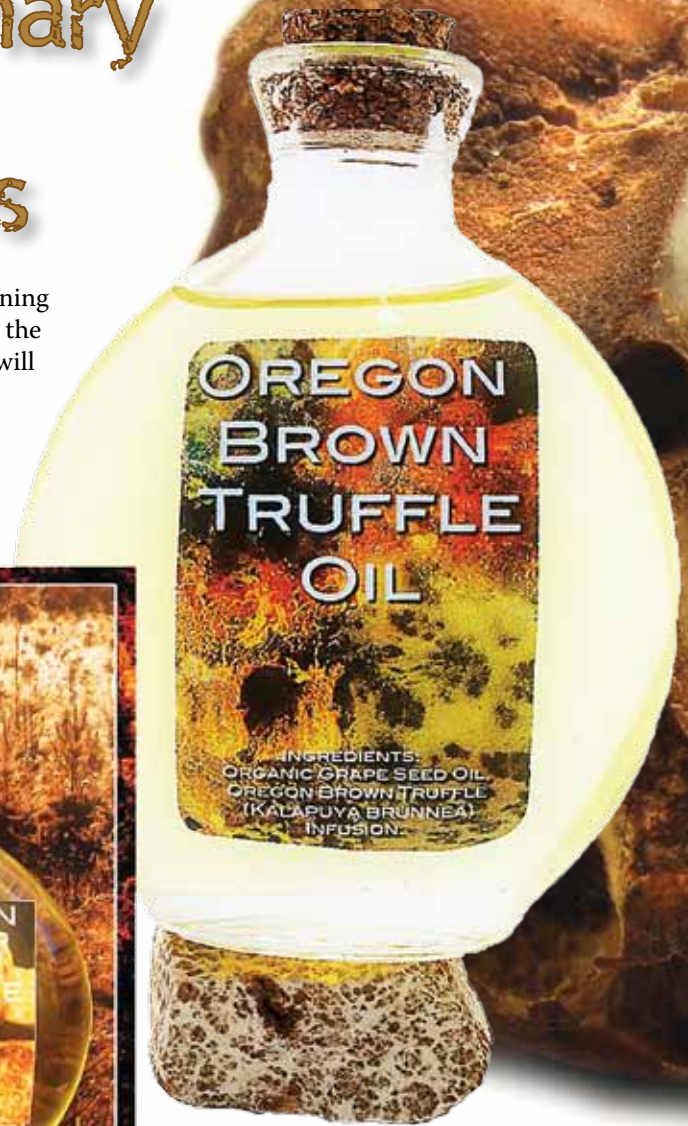
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“I don’t really like the flavor of mushrooms.” How many times have we mycophiles heard that, right? I usually respond with the standard “Well, mushrooms are like fruit. All species have vastly different flavors, textures, applications, etc. So, just because you don’t like bananas, you wouldn’t say that you don’t like all fruit. Apples and bananas couldn’t taste further apart, yet both belong under the same heading. The same goes for mushrooms.” And the same goes for truffles!

Each species of hypogeous fungi that we call a “truffle” has its own, and very distinct, aroma and flavor characteristics. Yet, it seems that the mainstream culinary world often forgets this, hasn’t caught on, or frankly, doesn’t care. It’s a great way to get an extra twenty bucks for a dish: “drizzled in truffle oil” or “topped with shaved truffles.” But that menu booster, impressive to the ego of foodies and fattening to the wallets of some restaurateurs, often tastes like a hot mess.

Experiencing ripe dog-harvested Oregon truffles will knock your socks off, when utilized correctly. The most highly sought Oregon truffles are the whites (*Tuber oregonense* and *T. gibbosum*), the brown (*Leucangium brunneum*), and the black (*L. carthusianum*). As noted, though, each have vastly different flavors and aromas. Here are a few of

my observations concerning the use of these gems in the kitchen. Hopefully this will help get you started on your next SUCCESSFUL Oregon truffle dining experience.



General truffle care and usage

We hold truffles in such high regard because of their powerful aroma and flavor.

The best way that I have found to harness their mojo is through infusion. This isn’t tough to do with a ripe Oregon truffle, I promise. Truffle aromas bond to fat molecules. And in our twenty first-century diets, fat certainly isn’t too hard to come by. Cream, butter, oil, eggs, animal fats; all fantastic vessels for the truffle. All we have to do is get the fat and truffle to do a little courting. Place a ripe truffle in a closed container with any type of fat for an extended period of time, and that’s that: infusion complete. The infusion that you’ve just made is highly delicate, however. Too

much heat will cook out any flavor and aroma. So you have to be careful. Use your infusion as an accoutrement, and add it at the last possible moment before dining. If you absolutely have to cook with it, though, do so gingerly and for the shortest amount of time possible. Or, just “truffle” a food that doesn’t have to be cooked at all, like prepared ice cream. *Yes, I said ice cream!*

The Oregon whites: *Tuber oregonense* and *T. gibbosum*

Tuber oregonense is our winter white truffle, and *T. gibbosum* our spring white. Although they are different species taxonomically, both share VERY similar culinary attributes. So, I’ll call them both “whites” for better or worse.

Whites are most certainly best used in savory applications. Many, including myself, would describe the aroma of



Maybe try making a soup with some infused milk. A sour cream dip for Sunday night football? It could work. I first suggest trying this one on a slice of bread, though. Take in all this truffle has to offer, and make up your own mind. Have fun! (Remember... broccoli cheese soup!)

The Oregon Black: *Leucangium carthusianum*

In my opinion, this is by far the most versatile of Oregon truffles. Remember that talk about ice cream? Here we go!

The Oregon black is fabulous in both sweet and savory dishes. I would describe its profile as fruity, chocolatey, caramely, and intoxicatingly earthy. Luckily, its profile works great all over the food spectrum. I love Oregon blacks when experienced with meats, cheeses, veggies, starches, etc. I make a ton of infused oil with this guy, and drizzle lots of different dishes with it. On a steak, tossed with potatoes, doused on a grilled veg, atop a cooked egg, and the list goes on. Once you experience this Oregon gem, you'll see what I mean.

Here's where we get a little crazy. Oregon black truffles and sweets are a match made in heaven. Infused into your ice cream? Yes! Infused into the half and half that's about to go in your mornin' mochafrappalattaccino? Yes! Infused into the butter-cream that's about to go cake-side? Yes! Oh, man. Even the thought of working with this truffle, or any Oregon truffle

for that matter, gets me fired up. Like I said above, truffles are a full sensory experience.

Unfortunately, Oregon truffles have historically been very poorly utilized around the world. The market has been full of under-ripe, raked truffles for too long. (For a review of the history of Oregon truffles, see the Truffle Issue of FUNGI, vol. 1 no. 3.) This is changing fast, though. Demand that your purveyor or favorite restaurants use only ripe, dog-harvested Oregon truffles. There's nothing like them... on this planet, at least.

Bon appetit! 🍄

Oregon whites as garlicky, floral, and a little earthy. I've found that these truffles work great when paired with numerous cheeses, red meats, doused on grilled garden veggies, and in cream-based pasta dishes. If you'd add garlic to a dish, or dip it in garlic butter, chances are that it would taste fabulous with an Oregon white. Truffle fries are a little cliché, but properly prepared Oregon white "truffled" French fries are an experience!

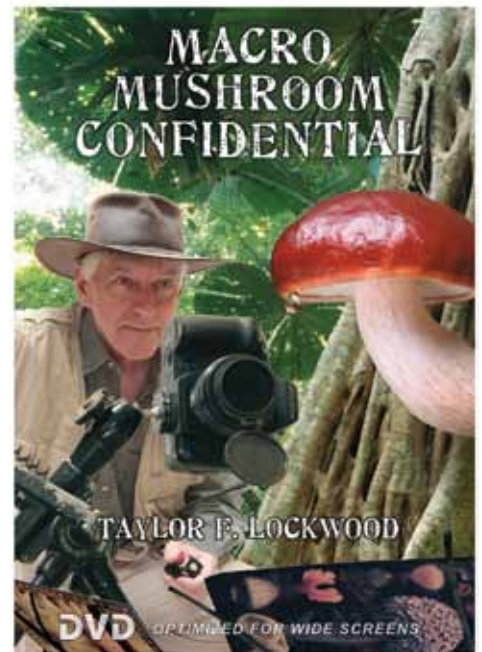
The Oregon brown: *Leucangium brunneum*

This is a strangely bizarre truffle to experience. In the right application though, it can be a mind-blower! The flavor/aroma of an Oregon brown would probably best be described as something like broccoli cheese soup. I told you that it was bizarre!

You either have to get really creative, or really un-creative with this one. Go find a really funky cheese to pair it with.



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