

Some Thoughts on Trufficulture in British Columbia

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We are starting to get a few inquiries on this topic so I wrote this basic summary for interested customers.

Truffles are underground mushrooms produced by fungi associated with tree roots. The association of roots plus fungi are called mycorrhizae. There are thousands of mycorrhizal fungi and a few hundred produce edible mushrooms such as porcini and chanterelles. There are hundreds of species of truffles but only about a dozen are commercially harvested. Two European species, Perigord black and Italian white truffles are the most valuable and the Perigord truffle has been cultivated successfully in orchards of inoculated trees (called truffieres) in Europe, North America, New Zealand and Australia. Bill Stewart, of Abbotsford, BC, is the first farmer to produce a European truffle in BC (*BC's First Perigord Truffle No Trifle*, Vancouver Sun, March 27, 2013). Several experimental truffieres are in development around the lower mainland of BC, time will tell how successful they will be.

Truffle cultivation is presently a young art, there is much uncertainty and much to learn about how to succeed. For example, truffle species of commerce tend to occur on limestone soils with high pH. Some truffieres that have produced successful crops raised the soil pH artificially with up 90 tons of lime per hectare. Raising the pH can obviously be costly and is an ongoing management practice if you don't have a limestone soil. Most commercial truffieres are in climates that average a bit warmer and drier than ours. Does this mean that Perigord truffles are not suitable for our climate and other species must be grown instead, or is there a potential for a decent crop here?

We have no doubt that some species of truffles can be farmed in BC, but presently it is more of a research endeavor than a true commercial crop. Because of the lack of a demonstrated commercial crop, BC Assessments does not recognize truffieres as an agricultural enterprise for farm tax qualification (but they do so recognize hazelnut orchards).

While it is in our plans to produce trees inoculated with truffles in the future we do not do so currently because we have not yet seen a big enough market to justify the needed investment. Check back next year! We offer consultation for those interested in starting a truffiere, contact us for rates.

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