

# BC's Truffle Industry: The Next Frontier is Underground

Posted by Rosi Hunter in [Uncategorised](#) and tagged [mycology](#), [truffle](#), [truffles](#) on March 14, 2020



*Dexter discovers a treasure*

When you are out foraging for mushrooms, could the real treasures be underground? The folks at the Truffle Association of BC say it's possible. The allure of truffles is well known, with prices as much as \$6,000/Kg for the most expensive type, the Italian White Truffle, *Tuber magnatum*. Finding them, though, is another story.

## What is a truffle?

If you don't know much about truffles, here are the Coles notes: Truffles are essentially a mushroom that fruits underground. With most fungi, the vegetative body of the organism lives underground all year, and only in fruiting season will it send up a reproductive structure that we know as a mushroom. But with truffles, the fruiting body never breaks the surface. In the absence of wind current, truffles have evolved to have animals disperse their spores. Truffles release an attractive scent that mimics the sex hormones of pigs, which allows them to sniff out, dig up, and eat the truffles, dispersing the spores elsewhere in their stools.

You may be thinking, "I like the smell of truffles, does that mean I like the smell of pig sex hormones?" Try not to read into it. Shannon Berch, the lead researcher for TABC, advised that to her knowledge there are no poisonous truffles because they rely on animals consuming them to propagate. Humans could, hypothetically, also be vectors of spore dispersal (I asked).



*Wild and cultivated truffle samples*

### **BC Truffle Festival**

On Saturday, February 29th, the BC Truffle Festival held an event at the UBC Farm, located on the unceded lands of the Squamish, Tseil-Watuth, and Musqueam First Nations. It was a crisp sunny day, and about 40 truffle enthusiasts gathered in a rustic yurt just a few minute's walk from UBC's Truffière (Truff-ee-AIR). In attendance were experts in every aspect of truffle mania you could think of: science, cultivation, culinary preparation, and of course, two adorable truffle dogs and their dedicated owners.

For something as secretive as truffles, the members of TABC were extremely generous with their information. The society actively encourages people to start cultivating truffles. However, as Sharmin Gamiet, truffle and mushroom cultivation consultant, puts it, "Growing Truffles is not for the faint of heart." In her presentation, we learned it takes about seven years of planning, soil pH adjustment, and roughly a \$35,000 investment before you see a truffle, if you're lucky. The UBC Farm Truffière was established with oak trees inoculated with Périgord truffle spawn in 2013 and is ripe to start producing truffles. Sadly, when we went out with the dogs, despite it being peak truffle season, there were none to be found. My fingers are crossed for next year.

## BC's Truffle Industry

"We are trying to create an industry," Doug Campbell, TABC volunteer and manager of the UBC Farm Truffière, told me after the event. Both wild truffle hunting and truffle cultivation are relatively new industries to BC. With Europe's truffle industry in decline due to climate change and deforestation, there is an opportunity to meet the growing global demand for truffles. There are only a handful of producing truffières in Canada, with Southern BC being one of Canada's few suitable growing regions. Varieties in cultivation in BC include Bianchetto (*Tuber borchii*) and Perigord (*Tuber melanosporum*).

However, no species is off the table (pun intended). Since BC's Truffle Industry is still emerging, it is an exciting new frontier for farmers and researchers to experiment and hopefully discover new techniques to grow previously uncultivated species. This is exactly what happened at ArborInnov Inc. in Sherbrooke, Quebec. Thanks to years of research and development in plant-fungi symbiosis (mycorrhizae), they successfully cultivated the Apalachian Truffle (*Tuber canaliculatum*) in 2016. You can learn more about their work at [arborinnov.com](http://arborinnov.com).



*A bianchetto truffle grown in Langley, BC*

<https://www.vanmyco.org/bcs-truffle-industry-the-next-frontier-is-underground/>