



The Truffle is the ultimate expression of woodland products, among which it is the undisputed ruler of the table and of the imagination of gourmets.

The Babylonians and the Egyptians were the first to sing its praises. The Pharaoh Khufu appreciated them, specially cooked and coated with goose fat.

There is also evidence that the Greeks used this precious mushroom. The philosopher, Theophrastus, pupil of Aristotle, made a first scientific classification of the truffle in his botanical studies, attributing the creation of the truffle to the divine combination of thunder and rain.

Truffles were also used to the same extent during the Ancient Roman period, when numerous philosophers and food experts praised them. The best known Roman food expert, Marcus Gavius Apicius, was particularly complimentary in his work *De Re Coquinaria*, describing the first methods of preparing it in Roman cooking.

In the Middle Ages, studies of the truffle were centred around a dispute over its origin and its botanical constitution. It was defined as a degenerative growth of the soil and even food of the devil or of the witches. Some thought that it was the link between the animal and vegetable kingdoms.

In 1700, the truffle was considered one of the finest foods in all the European courts. The search for truffles was an amusing palace game, to which guests and foreign ambassadors were invited to participate.

In subsequent periods numerous cultural figures publicly declared their appreciation of the virtues of this precious food: recalling only the most famous, we will mention Count Camillo Benso di Cavour, who used the truffle as a diplomatic instrument in his political activities, Gioacchino Rossini, who called it the Mozart of mushrooms, Lord Byron, who kept one on his desk because the fragrance aroused his creativity and Alexandre Dumas, who defined it the Sanctum Sanctorum, or Holy of Holies of food.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TRUFFLE

The truffle is an underground mushroom that, over millions of years of evolution, chose this kind of habitat, protected from the climate and from animals on the surface. It came to be and developed close to the roots of trees, particularly poplars, lindens, oaks and willows, becoming, after its formation, a true parasite.

Its characteristics are its strong aromatic fragrance that emanates only when its spores are perfectly ripe. When picked, the body of the mushroom must be extracted only if it is perfectly ripe, in order to maintain all of its organoleptic qualities. An unripe specimen will be heavier than a ripe one, but will be totally devoid of fragrance. Truffles are collected only in certain periods of the year, when their spores have finished their ripening phase and only with the help of dogs (pigs were also used at one time).

Truffles are protected and for this reason, mechanical and manual means are avoided, because they would seriously damage development of new filaments, which are deeply intertwined with the root system of the green woodland plants.

The Perugia area can be considered a huge truffle-ground, thanks to the numerous woods. As well as the white truffle and the rare black truffle, there are at least another seven or eight species of truffles present in the area throughout the year. Here are the different types of truffle found in the territory of Umbria:

THE FINE BLACK TRUFFLE OF UMBRIA

The Fine Black Truffle of Umbria (*Tuber Melanosporum Vittadini*) is the main kind of truffle in this area and those from Norcia and Spoleto are known all over the world. It is most commonly found in the territory bordering the course of the Nera river and in the province of Perugia, mainly on Mount Subasio.

It grows in chalky ground that has a high clay content and it lives in symbiosis with other plants - particularly the oak and the holm oak, but also with the beech and the chestnut tree. Its size varies from that of a walnut to the size of an apple and it is round and often irregular in shape. Its surface is rough to the touch but not angular. It has a distinct aromatic fragrance and reddish black flesh with small, white streaks.