



De Licio® Bianchetto truffle (*Tuber borchii*) ©

When young the bianchetto white truffle (*Tuber borchii*) strongly resembles the more expensive Italian white truffle (*Tuber magnatum*) with which it can be accidentally, or deliberately, confused. The aroma of bianchetto is also similar to the Italian white truffle, although a little more garlicky. The main differences between the two species is that bianchetto is harvested during winter and early spring whilst the Italian white truffle is harvested in autumn and early winter. Also at maturity bianchetto turns light brown to reddish brown often with irregular dark brown patches and the insides become coffee-coloured to dark brown criss-crossed with a network of fine white lines. The two species can also be distinguished by differences in the ornamentation on the surface of their spores. In Italy bianchetto range from pea sized to that of an egg but cultivated New Zealand truffles can weigh more than 125 g and are the size of a tennis ball. Unlike the Périgord black truffle the surface of bianchetto truffles are not ornamented but covered in tiny hairs giving them a suede-like appearance under the microscope.



A large bianchetto truffle from Jeff Weston's truffière

Although an excellent truffle bianchetto was undervalued in Italy in the past because it was often sold mixed with similar looking but poorer flavoured species such as *Tuber maculatum*, *Tuber dryophilum* and *Tuber puberulum*. These spoil the flavour of food containing them, a problem that persists in Italy and does nothing for the truffle industry as a whole.



Sometimes bianchetto truffles can fruit above the ground

Bianchetto truffles have been found from just north of Edinburgh, in the north to Sicily and Sardinia in the south. The bianchetto truffle was first cultivated in Italy in the late 1990s and the first commercial harvest in the Southern Hemisphere was made by Jeff Weston in Autumn and Winter 2008 at West Melton, near Christchurch, New Zealand. Retail prices in Italy can be higher than €500/kg but off-season truffles produced in New Zealand can fetch much higher prices which currently hover around NZ\$3000/kg for grade 1 truffles.



A natural bianchetto truffière near Marina di Ravenna, Italy

Bianchetto has a very wide host range which includes beech, black poplar, hazelnut, oaks, European limes, cedar, larch and pines. In New Zealand it has fruited on the common hazelnut, English oak, stone pine and maritime pine. It is known that bacteria and other soil microorganisms can be beneficial to the relationship a mycorrhizal fungus has within its host plant. The methods that Edible Forest Fungi New Zealand Ltd uses to produce its plants takes this into account.



Well trained dogs are essential during the harvest

For technical information on the bianchetto truffle contact Ian Hall, P.O. Box 268, Dunedin 9054, New Zealand, truffle1@ihug.co.nz, telephone +64-3-454 3574, +64-27-226 1844, web: www.trufflesandmushrooms.co.nz

To enquire about the availability of bianchetto mycorrhized trees please contact Kevin Fearn, Edible Forest Fungi New Zealand Limited, P.O. Box 384, Oamaru 9444, New Zealand, kevin@oregonnurseries.co.nz, telephone +64-3-431 3627, +64-27-450 4605, email web www.fffz.co.nz



Jeff Weston's productive truffière, West Melton, New Zealand

Our thanks to Jeff Weston for some of the photographs.