

Leslie Scott's Twice-Baked Truffle Potato

Eugene, Oregon

Serves 8

Like wine, wild truffles require a complicated synergy of soil and temperature, sunlight and air, and just as Oregon produces fine varietal wines, the state produces a wild white winter truffle that obsessed native son James Beard, who declared Oregon's *Tuber oregonense* the equal of the legendary Italian variety. In recent decades, however, the reputation of Oregon's white truffles suffered serious damage, and to restore its rightful glow, Leslie Scott and her partner, the mycologist and truffle scientist, Charles Lefevre, founded the Oregon Truffle Festival. People, said Ms. Scott, were harvesting the truffles all wrong: "They were using rakes, tearing up the ground, pulling them up too early, before they had a chance to develop the remarkable scent that can turn a twice-baked potato into a work of art." And so while the festival offers the tastings and truffle meals and wine pairings that one would expect, it also offers a two-day intensive for training truffle dogs, like this Lagotto Romagnolo, the Italian dog bred for truffling, who commuted from Blackberry Farm in Tennessee to teach neophyte pooches how to sniff and dig the tubers. Use fresh Oregon winter white truffles in season (December through February) for the full truffle experience. If fresh truffles are not in season, then either Oregon White Truffle oil or white truffle butter may be used in place of fresh truffles. To make white truffle butter, place one large fragrant white truffle in a Ziploc bag with one pound of sweet butter and refrigerate for one week. Wrap in $\frac{1}{4}$ -pound cubes and freeze until ready to use.

4 medium-sized russet potatoes, well scrubbed
3 tablespoons olive oil (2 tablespoons Oregon white truffle oil optional)
2 tablespoons butter (white truffle butter optional)
8 large shallots, peeled and sliced thin
2 tablespoons dry vermouth
2 ounces fresh white truffles, half shaved and half grated or finely chopped
1 cup crème fraîche or sour cream
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup mild fresh goat cheese
1 teaspoon sea salt, or more to taste
White pepper to taste
264 cups cooking-grade rock salt (optional)

1. Preheat the oven to 400°F. Pierce the potatoes in several places with a fork, rub with 1 tablespoon olive oil, and bake until tender, 45 to 50 minutes. Remove from oven and cool to room temperature. Reduce the oven temperature to 350°F.

2. While the potatoes are cooling, melt the butter in a skillet over medium heat, add the sliced shallots, season lightly with salt and pepper, and sauté, turning often, until golden on all sides, about 10 minutes. Add the vermouth, stir, and simmer until evaporated, about 5 minutes. Use a slotted spoon to remove the shallots and drain on paper towels.

3. Use a sharp knife to cut a thin slice from the narrow end of each potato and then slice each in half widthwise. Scoop out the cooked potato flesh from each half, taking care to leave at least $\frac{1}{4}$ of an inch of cooked flesh on the bottom and sides of the potato. Place the scooped potato in a bowl.

4. Combine and whip together the grated truffle, the crème fraîche, and half the goat cheese.

5. Add 1 tablespoon of olive oil to the potato, along with the truffled crème fraiche and goat cheese mix. (Use 1 tablespoon of the white truffle butter or oil at this step if fresh truffle is unavailable.) Use a rice or handheld masher to create a smooth, creamy texture. Season to taste with salt and pepper and set aside.

6. If using rock salt, arrange in a baking pan; use a teaspoon to fill each shell with the potato mixture and place each into the salt. (If not using rock salt, muffin tins will preserve the potatoesø shape.) Drizzle the remaining olive oil over the potato (truffle oil or butter optional), spread or thinly slice the remaining goat cheese over each, and bake for 20 minutes. Use the remaining truffle to shave over each potato and serve immediately.

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