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**A COMPLETE GUIDE TO  
TRUFFLE DOG TRAINING**

# The Art of Truffle Hunting

by Petra Vasilik

A step-by-step program, from foundation skills to field success, with instructional videos and photos to help guide you in training your dog to become an expert truffle hunter

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# Introduction

## Meet Your Guide - Petra Vasilik

*Click on the image below which will take you to my full bio.*

The next few pages will share why I chose truffle hunting as a hobby and what inspired me to teach other teams. Without a doubt, I can say that this has been the most rewarding hobby I have ever pursued. It would make me happy to be your inspiration!

Our first find!



## Introduction (Continued)

Step into the fascinating world of truffle hunting and discover a journey unlike any other. The **Art of Truffle Hunting**, created by truffle enthusiast and [Core Fit Canine](#) owner and trainer Petra Vasilik, is a comprehensive training program designed to help you and your dog grow into a confident and capable hunting team.

This is more than a traditional dog training guide. It offers step-by-step guidance, thoughtful insights, and scientific information that bring the process to life. Whether you are just starting out or looking to refine your skills, this guide supports you in developing both technique and partnership.

From foundational training to more advanced truffle scent work, each section builds your understanding while strengthening the bond between you and your dog. Along the way, you'll also explore the broader world of truffles — touching on sustainability, harvesting practices, and the unique relationship between dogs, environment, and these remarkable fungi.

Designed to be both structured and flexible, this guide allows you to move at your own pace while following a clear training progression. Each chapter can stand on its own, making it easy to revisit key concepts whenever needed.

The **Art of Truffle Hunting** is an invitation to experience the craft, deepen your connection with your dog, and step into a world of discovery, adventure, and lasting partnership.



## Why Did I Decide to Train My Dogs to Hunt Truffles?

People often ask me this question. I've always been deeply drawn to nature and the outdoors and I enjoy mushroom foraging. As a dog lover, I especially like those activities that allow me to be with my dogs. I competed in dog agility for many years, but most events were held indoors, while all I really wanted was to be outside with my dogs.

When I first heard about truffle dogs and the presence of cultivated and native truffles on the U.S. East Coast, it immediately felt like it could be the perfect fit: being outdoors with my dogs and working as a team to find this underground delicacy.

In 2019, I introduced my collie puppy Rosi to truffle scent and from that point on I knew we were going to have a fun journey together. It quickly became a passion, and today, Rosi and I work together in a beautiful partnership as a professional team. To me, every truffle find is a new discovery with its own magic.

My Jack Russell Terrier, Stewie, took to truffle training beautifully after retiring from agility at the age of 10. He is proof that you can teach an old dog new tricks! Even in his senior years, he still enjoys heading out to the orchard for a fun hunt, showing that the joy of the game can last a lifetime.



## My Inspiration For Teaching Others

I wanted to share what I have learned over years of truffle hunting — the experience, the journey, the successes and the mistakes I made along the way — so that others may progress with greater clarity and confidence.

The process of writing allowed me to reflect more deeply on the art of truffle hunting itself and realize how truly special this work is, shaped by countless small details.

Teaching other dogs and handlers has expanded my own understanding, continually refining what I thought I already knew. There is always another perspective to consider.

And finally — we need more skilled and thoughtful truffle hunting teams in our East Coast truffières. There is a growing demand for surveying young orchards as well as productive orchards by experienced dogs.

Having been part of the dog sports community for many years, I've seen how much people love giving their dogs meaningful jobs to keep them happy. Truffle hunting is a perfect outlet! It allows dogs to do what they naturally enjoy most: using their noses with purpose, digging with enthusiasm, and earning a delicious reward for their efforts.

Helping dogs and their handlers develop the skills they need for the unique and exciting world of truffle hunting brings me a great sense of joy. Truffle hunting isn't just about scent work, it's building a strong bond — a partnership. With each training session, the team develops a deeper connection built on many pillars: communication, trust, patience, intuition, encouragement and, of course, teamwork!

There's nothing more rewarding than seeing a dog and handler light up when they uncover their first truffle! One thing I love about the truffle hunting journey is that it has a clear framework and foundation, yet every hunt unfolds differently and is highly dynamic. Every outing gives a sense of a new adventure. With the perfect balance between knowledge and intuition, truffle hunting is truly an art.

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## Using This Guide

My Truffle Dog Training Program includes an introduction and a total of seven sections, plus a printer-friendly version of all exercises. Each section combines informative reading material with supporting videos and photos. The pages are designed in a clear and streamlined way, allowing you to easily distinguish between general information, practice exercises and miscellaneous training content. Each section begins with a front page that summarizes and links to the content covered in that section.

The truffle practice games (exercises), beginning in Section 3, are marked with numbered tags. Each level (Starting out, Novice, Advanced, Real Hunt) has its own distinct design for easy navigation through the exercises.



Starting Out Games



Novice Games



Advanced Games



First Orchard Hunt

The recommended frequency for practicing each exercise is only a guideline. Progress will depend on the individual dog and handler, and how quickly you build understanding and confidence. Use your judgment to decide when it feels appropriate to move on to the next step. Contact me anytime for questions!





## What Are Truffles?

Every truffle hunter should understand why truffles are so special. Truffles are the fruiting bodies of an underground mycorrhizal symbiotic fungal network, and they are distinct in their growth and structure, developing entirely below the soil surface and lacking stems and caps.

Truffles reproduce by dispersing their spores, which are contained within the truffle itself, by animals — rodents, mammals, insects — that eat them and then deposit the spores elsewhere through their droppings. This process is facilitated by the strong, distinctive odor that truffles emit as they mature.

The mycelium of truffles is ectomycorrhizal, meaning it grows along the outside of the roots of trees. This symbiotic network helps the truffle obtain nutrients like carbohydrates that the tree makes by photosynthesis, and in return, the mycelium enables the tree to better absorb water, minerals and nutrients. Research has also shown that the fungal network around the roots of the tree protects it from soil borne diseases, high temperatures, extreme pH changes and toxins. The most common host trees for truffles are oak, beech, hazel, hickory and conifers.

There are thousands of truffle species. The culinary species belong to the Tuberaceae or Morchellaceae family, both of which are in the Order Pezizales. The members of the Morchellaceae family are related to the famous Morel mushroom.

Beyond their culinary appeal, truffles play an important ecological role, contributing to soil health and forest biodiversity. Appreciating their rarity, biology, and connection to the environment adds a deeper level of respect to the hunt.

At the end of the guide you will find a **section dedicated to common truffle species.**

# Advanced Training Exercises – Introduction

**In this phase, we intentionally increase complexity to build reliability and resilience.**

Truffles are hidden deeper, the number of hides is varied, and training takes place in different weather conditions (warm, cold, dew, frost, drizzle, windy), new locations with distractions (i.e. birds) and with diverse terrain (edge of forest, ditches, pond, hill, parking lot, greenways). These changes teach your dog to adapt to shifting odor patterns, remain persistent beyond the first find, and maintain focus despite new environments. During your advanced practice, observe and make note of your dog's hunting and indication behavior in familiar versus new environments in your truffle hunting log for this.

## **When truffles are buried deeper:**

- Odor is more contained and diffuses differently
- The dog must commit to digging with determination
- Indication behavior may become more intense or more refined

## **Increasing and varying quantity of truffles teaches:**

- Persistence after the first find
- Independence in continuing the search
- Clarity in handler communication



# Advanced Training Exercises – Introduction (Continued)

## Ask yourself:

- Is my dog struggling to focus in new locations?
- Does my dog's indication look less confident or less precise?
- Is my dog more distracted or hesitant?

A novel set-up can temporarily reduce confidence and clarity, even in well-trained dogs. If you notice regression, think about how to make the situation easier.

Confidence grows from success. Sometimes the best strategy is to take a step back.

Lower the difficulty of the exercise and / or the surroundings so your dog can succeed again. From there, rebuild gradually.

## You might:

- Simplify the exercise (easy hide)
- Reduce distractions
- Choose less overwhelming terrain
- Shorten the session
- Increase rate and/or value of rewards
- Make sure to stay calm and flexible
- Pay close attention to your own handling

**When adding challenges, it is a good idea to change only one major variable at a time whenever possible, for example:**

- Deeper hide, but familiar location
- New location, but shallow hide
- Windy day, but only one truffle

