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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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## **Printer-Friendly Version of All Training Exercises**

(See additional PDF File included along with this book)

# 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)

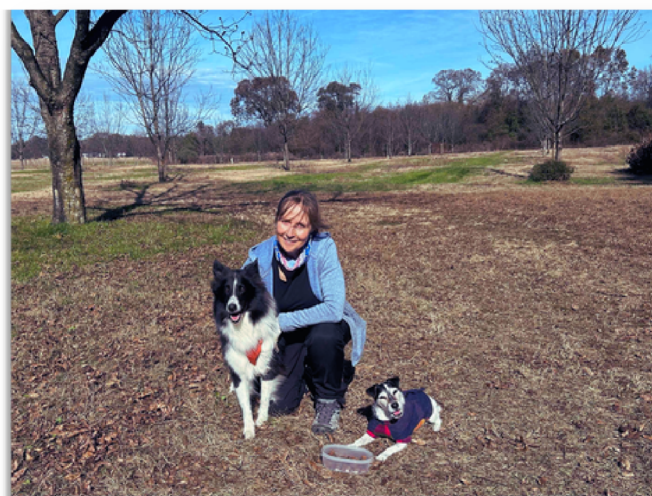
Step into the fascinating world of truffle hunting and discover a journey unlike any other. The **Art of Truffle Hunting**, created by truffle enthusiast and [Core Fit Canine](#) owner and trainer Petra Vasilik, is a comprehensive training program designed to help you and your dog grow into a confident 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 as the sport increasingly moved indoors, I discovered that my passion was really in spending time outdoors with my dogs. Truffle hunting could ultimately become the perfect way to combine teamwork, adventure, and a love of nature.

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 experienced teams to survey young orchards as well as hunt in productive orchards.

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 about 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.

## 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.





## 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 the spores contained within their fruiting bodies. Because they grow underground, they rely on animals such as rodents, other mammals, and insects to locate and eat them. The spores pass through the animals' digestive systems and are then deposited elsewhere in their droppings, helping to spread the fungus to new locations. To attract these animals, mature truffles emit a strong, distinctive aroma that signals they are ready to be found and consumed.

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.

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.](#)**

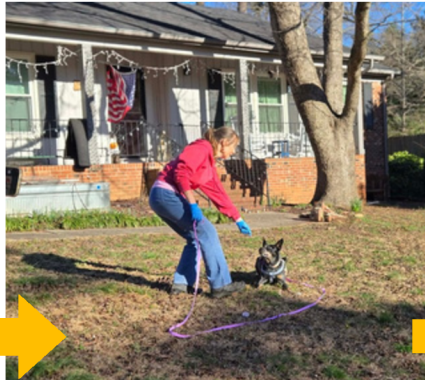
**Next, introduce one or two more empty tins (or tea strainers) and place them a few feet apart. Only one container should hold the truffle odor (wear gloves for handling the targets).** Release your pup and observe closely. The moment your dog locates the tin with the truffle odor, also called the “source” — mark immediately with your clicker or marker word. Follow with several high-value treats delivered directly at the source. Be mindful not to apply too much pressure toward your dog — shift your weight back as you bend down. Too much forward pressure can cause more sensitive dogs to move off the target.

**Show your dog that you are tossing a cookie for him to get (cue “get it”, or “toss”) and while he is searching for it, quickly move the tins to different spots, so when he returns, he can search again for the correct tin.** Repeat switching the tins several times. If your dog investigates an empty tin, simply allow them to move on without comment. No correction! Just wait for the correct choice and mark that success.

You may introduce a search cue at this stage; however, the primary goal of this exercise is for the dog to continue imprinting on the odor and begin hunting for it independently, without relying on a cue. See details on search cues in the next section.

**Repeat this game several times over one to two weeks, or until you feel your dog clearly and consistently understands that their job is to locate the specific truffle odor, not just any container.** Some high drive dogs will quickly get bored with the odor introduction games or may start offering other behaviors. **Keep sessions very short — less than 3 minutes.** Always end on a positive note. Excessive alert training can kill the hunt drive, so it is always better to stop while they are still having fun.

**Note:** If this exercise seems too challenging for your young puppy, keep playing the game with one scent tin or the “Pup Meets Truffle” game (up next). You can also place the truffle inside a toy and reward when the puppy interacts with the toy. Most puppies over about four months of age are typically able to understand the scent discrimination game.



## Video 2: Click Photo



## The Teamwork of Digging (Continued)

**Every dog exhibits a slightly different digging style, and part of training is learning to work with the dog you have.** There are often noticeable breed tendencies, for example, terriers were bred to go to ground and can be extremely fast, intense diggers — sometimes a bit too enthusiastic! Herding breeds often dig more methodically and thoughtfully, reassessing odor frequently. Many hound, sporting, and working breeds can be very powerful diggers with strong stamina and determination. Individual personality, however, matters just as much as breed. Keep in mind that you may be inadvertently creating a vigorous digger by accidentally rewarding the digging action, rather than the nose point. Digging should only be rewarded if your dog is hesitant to dig, which will be discussed later in this section.

**Some dogs won't dig at all,** and merely paw at the site of the truffle hole. This could be the dog's preference of indicating, or it may reflect lower confidence, motivation or uncertainty about what is expected. Before trying to change it, consider your hunting goals. If you plan to hunt in an orchard where digging may be limited or discouraged, a light paw or clean nose indication might be ideal. In that case, this dog could be perfectly suited for the job. If you need stronger digging for wild hunting, you can gradually build that behavior. But always evaluate whether it's truly necessary. The best indication style is the one that matches your environment, protects the truffle, and keeps your dog confident and engaged.



# 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



# SECTION 6

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## Training Tips – Advanced Level (Continued)

**Once your dog becomes reliable with advanced games #6 and #7, you can begin introducing additional culinary truffle species.** The VOC profiles of different truffle species share many similarities, so dogs usually transition between them without any difficulty. For example, if you initially trained with *Tuber lyonii*, you can then introduce *Tuber melanosporum*, or vice versa. Ideally, avoid hiding two species during the initial introduction or practice sessions. Allow your dog to focus exclusively on the new odor first, helping them build a clear understanding and recognition of that particular truffle scent.

### **Your dog may find non-culinary truffles while out on regular forest hikes.**

Once a dog has been exposed to a variety of truffle species and has learned to recognize the shared VOC profiles, they may begin to generalize and alert to these odors outside of formal hunting contexts. It is not uncommon for a dog, even while wearing everyday gear, to suddenly alert and begin digging when they encounter a wild truffle species with similar scent characteristics. These spontaneous finds can be exciting and add a sense of adventure to your outings. When this happens, it is important to support the behavior. Take the time to assist your dog in locating the source and acknowledge their effort with praise or a reward. Reinforcing these moments helps maintain your dog's confidence and strengthens their understanding that identifying truffle odor — regardless of context — is valuable and meaningful.

Below are two common non-culinary truffles that your dog may hone in on. These were found by Rosi on our hikes.



*Genea* Sp.

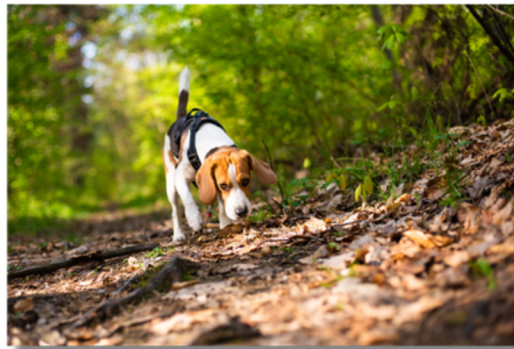


*Elaphomyces* Sp.



## Orchard vs. Wild Hunting (Continued)

The environmental factors of **wild truffle hunting require not only a well-conditioned dog, but also a handler with strong situational awareness and solid backcountry skills.** For these reasons this adventure is best undertaken by experienced teams who understand terrain safety, canine conditioning, and proper field preparation. Your **dog needs to have a solid recall** due to the highly distracting visual and odor pictures and frequently being off leash. Some areas in the Appalachians may simply not be producing truffles at a given time. Because of this, **your dog must have patience, stamina, and emotional resilience.**



In many parts of the United States, wild **truffles may not be as productive as they once were** due to changing climate patterns, drought, habitat disturbance, logging, development, and shifts in forest health. Truffle hunters quickly learn that no two seasons are ever the same and that the land ultimately decides what it is willing to give. **Wild truffle hunting is inherently unpredictable and the harvest is never guaranteed** — which is part of what makes this activity so magical, authentic, and deeply humbling.

# What Makes an Experienced Team?

**An experienced truffle hunting team has a strong partnership, clear communication, and the ability to work together confidently in a variety of environments.** Both the handler and the dog understand their roles within the hunting sequence and support each other throughout the process.

**The dog shows enthusiasm at the start of the hunt, remains focused during the search, and demonstrates resilience when challenges arise.** They can work through different terrain, soil types, weather conditions, and distractions while maintaining motivation and confidence. Their indication becomes more refined with experience, often showing clear digging behavior followed by precise nose pointing to locate the truffle.

The handler, in turn, learns to read the dog's subtle signals and body language. **An experienced handler knows when to step in and assist, when to allow the dog to problem-solve independently, and when it is time to end the hunt** before fatigue or frustration sets in. Handling becomes smooth and calm, with cues delivered clearly and consistently.

**Together, the team develops endurance for longer searches and gains confidence working in new environments.** They understand the flow of the hunt, adapt to unexpected situations, and maintain a positive emotional experience throughout the activity.

**Ultimately, an experienced truffle hunting team works in harmony.** Their communication feels natural, their movements become coordinated, and both handler and dog share the excitement and reward of discovering truffles together.



## Video Library (Continued)

### Video 14

**Focus:** short sequence

**Description:** This was the first find of the day at the pecan orchard. Rosi indicates, and I join her to harvest the truffle. The sandy, loamy soil is loose, so I can usually feel the truffle easily with my hands and don't usually need a trowel. Rosi is rewarded for the find.

► [Watch Video](#)

### Video 15

**Focus:** triangulation, full sequence

**Description:** Another windy day at the pecan orchard. You can see Stewie working hard to triangulate and analyze the direction of the odor. After he indicates, I step in to help locate the truffle. He generally prefers to keep digging while I search, and I'm okay with that. Once I find it, I show it to him and reward him.

► [Watch Video](#)

### Video 16

**Focus:** full sequence, nose-to-truffle targeting

**Description:** Stewie is wearing his puffer coat as he gets cold quickly in the winter. He picks up odor, head checks to the left and then indicates. By closely watching his nose, I can pinpoint the truffle's location. I briefly place it on the ground for him to nose-point, then praise and reward him.

► [Watch Video](#)

### Video 17

**Focus:** dislodged truffle, nose-to-truffle targeting

**Description:** This short video demonstrates how I let Rosi do her job searching for the dislodged pecan truffle. I watch her nose closely as it moves across the soil and then reveals the truffle to me.

► [Watch Video](#)

### Video 18

**Focus:** dislodged truffle, very small truffle, nose-to-truffle targeting

**Description:** Rosi tracks down a small pecan truffle that became dislodged while digging.

► [Watch Video](#)