meticulously researched and documented, they are not only a model of scholarship but also a guide to methodology. Indeed, Professor van Winter emphasizes the need to delve into a wide range of sources, from culinary manuscripts to household accounts, from agricultural history to trade records, in order to find answers to the perennial question: what did they eat?

Though trained as an historian, Professor van Winter also demonstrates, as do many culinary historians, a practical bent. She notes that liquid salt, as represented by the Roman fish sauce, garum, or the fish sauces of Southeast Asia, helps keep the meat moist, whereas granulated salt extracts the juices. Having experimented with recipes from a sixteenth-century manuscript cookery book, she pronounces them delicious and offers a sample, with her own commentary, for readers to try. With Sauce Dorfpine, for example, she explains that the bone marrow should be added near the end of cooking so that the sourness of the sauce can develop fully.

Professor van Winter’s research concentrated on the Netherlands and northern Europe, so when she asks the question: “Were raw salads indeed served, and if so, at the beginning or elsewhere in the course of a meal?” she does not look for answers in Mediterranean writings. According to the medical theory of the time, salads were classified as cold and moist and not always conducive to good health. The first record she finds, for the Netherlands, is in the late sixteenth century, when a salad of lettuce and red cabbage was served at the end of a meal. This evidence might lead to a conclusion that salads were a late introduction to European tables. Yet salads were commonly eaten in southern France, Italy, and Spain in the fifteenth century, if not earlier. When le roi Réné was in residence at Aix-en-Provence, his kitchen received regular deliveries of lettuce and herbs, often specifically described as “pour faire salade.” The bishop of Avignon was also served salads in summer. The splendid Italian dinners whose menus are detailed in The Neapolitan Recipe Collection: Cuoco Napolitano (ed. Terence Scully, 2000) often began with insalata. Felix Platter, a student in Montpellier in the mid-sixteenth century, noted that salads were served at the start of the evening meal throughout the year. We should remember that European eating habits were probably just as diverse in the medieval period as they are now, and that it is idiosyncrasies such as these that make the study of food, cooking, and eating so fascinating. For instance, in her chapter on the consumption of dairy products in the Netherlands in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Professor van Winter points out that the Dutch and Flemish were distinguished by their regular use of butter in their cooking, while in other countries lard and oil were more typical.

What and how people ate in the medieval period was intimately linked to medical beliefs—at least for those who had the luxury of choice. Van Winter repeatedly warns of the limitations of the available evidence, which principally relates to the nobility, the clergy, and the wealthy. The general consensus among physicians that raw fruit was harmful, together with the paucity of information on apples, quinces, pears, plums, and cherries in the available recipe collections, leads her to the conclusion that “it is unlikely that these fruits were eaten raw earlier than the sixteenth century.” Of course, we have no idea whether the fruit grown at that time developed the same sweetness as fruits today, but it seems to me just as likely that people would value fresh fruits for their flavor and enjoy them straight from the tree during their brief season as an opportune snack.

This compilation of Professor van Winter’s writings on food in the medieval period represents a significant contribution to the scholarship on this subject, especially for its insights into the food and cooking of the Netherlands (the subject of ten chapters). One minor reproach is that as a compilation, it suffers from the fault of all such collections of disparate articles from a diversity of publications, in that the same information is often repeated from chapter to chapter.

—Barbara Santich, University of Adelaide

Taming the Truffle—The History, Lore, and Science of the Ultimate Mushroom
Ian R. Hall, Gordon T. Brown, and Alessandra Zambonelli
Portland, OR: Timber Press, 2007
304 pp. Illustrations. $29.95 (cloth)

Have you yearned to include fresh truffles in your culinary creations but quailed at paying eight hundred dollars per pound? Well, why not grow your own? Taming the Truffle tells you how, but, as the authors reveal in clear prose, it’s considerably more complicated than growing radishes.

Three experts contributed to the volume. Ian Hall pioneered the introduction and production of Périgord black truffles in New Zealand, initially as a government scientist and later as a private consultant. Alessandra Zambonelli is a key player in truffle research in her native Italy. Professional writer and editor Gordon Brown succeeds in making this highly technical subject and esoteric terminology readily accessible to the lay audience.
Truffles are not recent comers to haute cuisine. Chapter 1, “From the Past Comes the Present,” takes us back to the days of the Greek philosopher Theophratus (370–286 B.C.) and the Roman natural historian Pliny the Elder (23–79 A.D.), both of whom speculated on the mysterious origin of truffles. The oldest known European cookbook, thought to have been written by M. Gaius Apicius (d. 40 A.D.), contained six recipes for cooking with truffles and a method for storing them in sawdust. Interest in truffles continued until the Dark Ages, when written records about them ceased, possibly because they had acquired a superstitious reputation for being “the devil’s handiwork, grown from the spit of witches.” Then, in the sixteenth century, interest revived, ushering in “The Golden Age of Truffles.”

Chapter 2, aptly titled “Science to the Rescue,” explains the key to cultivating truffles—not in composted manure as for button mushrooms, or on wood as for shiitake, but in an intricate symbiosis between truffle fungi and living trees, termed mycorrhiza, a word derived from Greek that literally means “fungus-root.” The authors explain this amazing phenomenon, in which the mold filaments of truffle fungi sheath the tiny feeder rootlets of trees such as oaks and hazels and actually grow between the outer rootlet cells. More filaments grow from the sheath into the surrounding soil to absorb nutrients and water, which are transported to the rootlets for use by the trees. The trees, in turn, provide carbohydrates and probably vitamins and hormones to the fungi. This partnership is so mutually beneficial to both trees and fungi that neither can survive without the other. One happy product of this interdependence is the fungal fruit-body, the truffle, which contains the spores needed for reproduction.

If you suppose that it is challenging to manage this intricate fungus-root relationship in order to establish truffle orchards, or truffières, you are correct. Rootlets of tree seedlings can be inoculated with spores obtained from ripe truffles, but success in inoculating seedlings so far works for only a few species, preeminently the Périgord truffle, and is a science in itself. Moreover, the habitat requirements of the Périgord truffle, the species most commonly grown in truffières, are quite specific: a strongly alkaline, limestone soil; and a Mediterranean climate. There go the hopes of many who would like to grow truffles in their backyard. As Taming the Truffle explains in satisfying detail, however, liming can provide the right soil milieu in many cases, and climate can be partially manipulated by irrigation and control of shading to modify soil moisture and temperature. The establishment and maintenance of truffières is the main thrust of the book and will well serve any who crave to produce truffles for fun or profit.

Once truffles actually appear in a truffière, how do you find them? After all, they grow below ground. In nature, wild animals disperse the spores formed inside the truffle. The animals detect truffles by their aroma and dig them up: mice, squirrels, and many other animals are the original truffle gourmets! They digest most of the truffle except the spores, which they later excrete elsewhere to potentially colonize new feeder rootlets. Truffières are generally established where wild, truffle-eating animals are happy to harvest the truffles before the truffière owner does. Taming the Truffle doesn’t deal with this problem: I have visited truffières in Australia that have electric fences designed to keep out wombats and bandicoots, and American truffière managers have developed protocols for rodent control.

Yet animals are also the allies of the truffière owner. To harvest the belowground truffle, you have to find it. Pigs are exceedingly fond of truffles and were used in earlier times to locate them, but the hunter had to be attuned to the nuances of pig behavior to get to the truffle before the pig. Nowadays, trained dogs are the common allies of the truffle hunter, as they will accept another food reward. Hall et al. instruct you in the essentials of training a truffle dog.

Taming the Truffle contains this advice and much more. Even if you don’t crave growing truffles, this informative and highly readable book reveals the fascinating mysteries, lore, and biology of this ultimate food better than any other book in English. It is a paragon of science written for the interested layperson.

—Jim Trappe, Oregon State University, Corvallis

Trust in Food: A Comparative and Institutional Analysis
Unni Kjærnes, Mark Harvey, and Alan Warde
x + 228 pp. $74.95 (cloth)

Today’s consumers are increasingly forced to trust others to produce much of their foodstuffs, as technological and commercial changes have put more distance between the farm and the table. Distrust about food became commonplace in the 1990s following food scares relating to E. coli, salmonella, and various contaminated foodstuffs. The scandal over BSE in British beef was perhaps the most notable of these scares, reflecting a failure to understand the underlying science as well as poor political management. Remarkably, British consumers continue to exhibit relatively high levels of trust in their food supply, as do those in a number of other European nations. Hence Unni Kjærnes,