



PERKS

All in a roe

It once served as peasant food, even pig fodder. But in modern times, caviar has been reserved for the wealthiest tables, thanks to European royalty and the likes of Charles Ritz, who introduced it as a permanent menu item in the five-star Paris hotel bearing his name in the 1920s.

The delectable fish eggs come from the bellies of wild sturgeon. Beluga caviar, which is dark and large, is generally considered to be the ne plus ultra. Paler osetra and smaller-sized sevruga rate second and third. The roe can't be harvested without killing the fish that produce it, and stocks have dwindled dramatically in waters where the tastiest and most-prized varieties come from: the Caspian Sea in Russia and Iran. As a result, this past January, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), a United Nations body, stopped virtually all legal export of caviar from those areas.

Fresh caviar won't last longer than about a year in commercial

storage or three months unopened in your home fridge. So be warned: by this winter, anyone who claims to be selling Caspian Sea caviar will in all likelihood be offering a product that's either poached or fake.

What's a caviar lover to do? Well, there are a couple of options. You can stock up now on the tiny bit that remains. Or you can

Be warned: by this winter, you will very likely be unable to find the best caviar for any price

follow the lead of the Endangered Fish Alliance, a Canadian coalition founded by top chefs and conservationists aiming to interest foodies in sustainable alternatives: farmed white sturgeon caviar; farmed paddlefish roe; farmed rainbow trout roe; whitefish roe and wild Pacific salmon roe. The group's members hail from a cross-country list of high-end eateries: Vancouver's Raincity Grill, Edmonton's Blue Pear, Ottawa's Courtyard Restaurant, Michael Stadtländer's Eigensinn Farm in Singhampton, Ont., Fox Harb'r Golf Resort & Spa in Wallace, N.S., and numerous critically acclaimed fine-dining establishments in Toronto, among them Avalon, Chiado, the

