



the early beginnings of olive oil

The olive tree has played a prominent role in the history of man; from the Pharaohs of Egypt to present day, where the olive tree branch is a universal symbol for peace. At the beginning of civilization, 4000 years before Christ, olive trees were brought to Palestine from Armenia and were planted throughout the land. Thanks to the Phoenicians, the great oil traders of ancient times, the precious liquid was then brought to Greece, where it was revered for all its splendor. In addition to being a food, the Greeks used olive oil as fuel for lamps, in sacred initiations and as a massage oil to prepare the skin before fighting in the arena.

The importance of Olive oil continued to increase during the Roman Empire to the point where the Empire's Southern regions were organized around oil provinces. However, the collapse of the Roman Empire signaled the end of the cultivation of the olive tree. The ancient plant survived only around convents and in the fortified regions high in the hills of Tuscany.

In 1100 AD, olive groves again began to propagate in Italy with Tuscany becoming the primary center for the cultivation of the olive tree. Strict laws were issued during that time, regulating the cultivation of the olives and the commerce of oil and, in fact, many of those same laws are still followed today. Venice and Genoa also began to trade oil and each year more and more oil was produced from the countries of the Mediterranean river basin. At the beginning of 1300 AD, the regions of Puglia and Calabria became an enormous olive grove and olive trees were planted in other regions of Italy, making it the center of olive oil production throughout the world.

The wars of 1400 AD marked a critical time for oil production but it was only a short time before olive oil, especially Italian olive oil, rebounded and again became the lead player on the sumptuous renaissance tables of Europe.

Olive Oil production leveled-off during the 1600's due to high taxes and did not begin to grow up until the early 1700's with the development of the free market and the exemption of taxes on olive groves. In the 1800's olive groves continued to flourish thanks to the monetary incentives guaranteed by the Papal State.

Now, at the end of the 20th century olive oil continues to grow in popularity. One of the main reasons for the increased consumption of olive oil is the growing awareness of the Mediterranean diet and its positive effects on health. In the 1970's American scientists published several nutritional diets citing the correlation between the Mediterranean diet and lower incidences of health problems. Based on fresh vegetables, seasonal fruits, grains, fish, meats and olive oil, the studies confirmed that foods of the Mediterranean region are not only delicious but can be good for people as well.

from olive to oil

Olives are harvested from November until March, six to eight months after their spring blossoms appear. They require very warm average temperatures, and cannot tolerate cold below 10° F (-12° C). They do well in very dry climates, and can tolerate droughts and high winds. Not surprisingly, they grow beautifully in the Mediterranean, with its mild winters and long, hot summers, where 98% of world's olive oil is harvested. Spain is the largest producer of olive oil, followed by Italy and then Greece. Other major producers include France, Turkey, Tunisia and Morocco.

In many regions of the Mediterranean, olives are still picked by hand, using wooden tools, or beaten from the trees with poles and caught in large nets. Other olive farmers now use machine harvesting, including trunk and branch shakers. Still others collect olives that fall naturally to the ground, or are nudged by wind and rain. To obtain the best oil, some growers harvest olives just as they change color, indicating that almost all the oil has formed and that they are at peak flavor.

Once collected, olives are rushed to mills for same day or, at most, next day pressing -olives not pressed immediately begin to oxidize and ferment.

The entire olive is used to make the oil; pulp, skin and even husk. Thousands of years ago, crushing was done by hand in spherical stone basins. Today, in a similar method, olives are crushed by mechanical stainless steel grindstones, and result in an olive paste. The paste is mixed with water, placed on circular hemp mats, stacked, and pressed. This "cold press" yields an olive liquid later separated. It is the cold olive oil to maintain its flavor, color and nutritional value. In fact, olive is the only oil which can be consumed as it is removed from the fruit.



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A gentle filtration process is used to remove sediment and produce extra virgin olive oil with an acidity level of less than 1%. Any oil with acidity above this level receives an additional refining step to remove almost all traces of color, aroma, taste and acidity, resulting in extra light tasting olive oil. In order to produce the grade of oil simply known as pure olive oil, extra virgin is added back to extra light to achieve the desired level of flavor and aroma. Like a fine wine, each variety of olive oil is evaluated by tasting and measuring acidity before bottling.

Also like wine, no two olive oils are alike. Each is a unique product of soil, climate, olive variety and age, and processing method. Oils can be fruity or flowery, nutty or spicy, delicate or mild, and can range from clear, to pale green, to golden, to deep olive green in color. When properly processed, olive oil can fully maintain the flavor, aroma and vitamins of the eloquent olive from which it came.

olive oil classes

The taste and color of every single olive oil can widely vary depending on many different factors including: soil type, climatic conditions, age of olives at cultivation, variety of cultivated olives and even the degree to which the olive tree is exposed to winds and other conditions. In fact, the oil obtained from the same variety of olive tree cultivated in the same growing region can vary significantly.

Four basic types of olive oil are available and categorized by their quality characteristics which are:

- Extra Virgin
- Virgin
- Pure
- Lampante olive oil



The criteria used to classify olive oils include the natural acidity of the oil at the time of packaging, as well as a taste evaluation of the product from the average grading of at least 8 tasters.

The senses used in the evaluation of olive oil are: smell, sight and taste. The 'smell test' evaluates the intensity of the oils' scent, whilst the visual analysis looks at the oils' clarity, density and color. The final, and most important test determines the oils taste, it makes sure that the oil has a good, balanced flavor, and will establish whether or not the oil will have an unpleasant after taste.



olive oil tasting

Like fine wine, olive oil flavors are unique and can be appreciated with a little practice. (before starting slice plain crusted bread into pieces large enough for dipping.)

1. Pour generous amount of each olive oil into individual glass bowls; notice variety of hues by holding bowl against a white background.
2. Cleanse palate with glass of water and piece of bread before each tasting.
3. Before tasting, swirl oil around in bowl to release more aroma; hold bowl under nose and inhale, allowing self to be enveloped in bouquet; take notice of intensity of each variety.
4. Begin with generously dipping piece of bread in mildest olive oil to avoid distorting flavors of oils to follow; before swallowing, take some air into mouth to help release flavors; notice smoothness of oil, and enjoy intensity of aftertaste

slippery facts

- ? **Botanists** claim that the normal life span of an olive tree is 300 to 600 years; some claim there are even trees alive in the Mediterranean Basin that are over 1000 years old.
- ? **The Olive tree** is an evergreen.
- ? There are currently about 800 million olive trees in the world.
- ? **Olive trees** do not bear fruit until 5 to 8 years old and don't reach full development until 20.
- ? They mature and at full production from 35 to 150 years of age, after which they will bear irregular crops almost indefinitely.
- ? The average tree produces 33 to 44 pounds of olives per year, or the equivalent of 3 to 4 liters of oil per year (It takes about 11 pounds of olives to make 1 liter of oil)
- ? **More than 70 varieties** of olives are grown throughout world
- ? **Green olives** are actually unripe black olives. Black olives are green olives that have been left to ripen on the tree.
- ? Revered for its fragrance, the golden oil of the olive was used in ancient civilizations as a body ointment and to heal wounds.
- ? The early Egyptians used olive oil to ease the movement of the great stones used to build the pyramids.
- ? Throughout the Mediterranean Basin the luster and beauty of wood from the olive tree was prized by cabinet makers.
- ? The ancient Greeks burned olive oil in lamps as a source of light.



2000 year old Etruscan Grind Stone Olive Mill