



Olive Oil



Olive oil has been a staple in the Mediterranean diet for over 2,500 years. Olive oil adds flavors and textures to Mediterranean foods and is high in health-promoting monounsaturated fats and antioxidants.

Olive Oil Flavors

Olives are the fruit of the olive tree. Soon after harvest, olives are cleaned then crushed into a mash. The mash has three distinctive parts: olive solids, olive water and olive oil. The olive solids and olive water are separated from the oil, and the oil is bottled. The best quality olive oils are obtained from the first pressing of the olives and are “cold pressed.” Cold pressed means the olives are not heated during the pressing process. Heating produces larger amounts of oil but decreases important flavor and the health-promoting antioxidants – flavonols and polyphenols.

Olive Oil Grades

Olive oil is graded on taste, acidity level, and processing method. The table below lists the main types of olive oil in order of decreasing quality.

Type of Oil	Description	Taste	Uses
Extra Virgin	Highest quality oil made from first pressing with no heat or chemicals (unrefined). Contains more healthy nutrients and phytochemicals.	Superior Distinctive aroma and taste Intense fruity flavor Low in acidity	Dips, salads and drizzled over stews and fish.
Virgin	Lacks perfect taste of extra virgin but isn't refined.	Good Mild taste and odor Fruity flavor that varies in intensity	Frying, grilling and roasting. Can also be used the same way as extra virgin but with less flavor.
Olive	Blend of virgin and refined (chemically treated) oils.	Lacks flavor Has a mild flavor	When flavor isn't wanted. Used in grilling, frying and baking.
Lite	The word “lite” means the oil has been refined, NOT that it's lower in fat or calories.	Lacks flavor Has a neutral flavor	When flavor isn't wanted especially in baking. Used when frying.

Buying and Storing Olive Oil

Olive oil should be stored in a cool, dark place. Exposure to air, heat and light can lead to oxidation and rancidity. Age is another enemy of olive oil. Recent research has shown that many of the health-promoting compounds degrade within 12 months. Store olive oil in a dark glass bottle or stainless steel container. Do not store in plastic bottles. Olive oil can react with plastic containers. Always check the date on the bottle and buy oil that has been bottled within the past 0 to 9 months.

Cooking With Olive Oil

Olive oil can be used for frying and even deep frying. The International Olive Oil Council says olive oil's smoke point is 410°F. The smoke point for extra virgin olive oil is around 406°F, and the smoke point for lite olive oil is around 468°F. Since the temperature for pan frying is normally between 350°F to 375°F, both lite olive oil and extra virgin olive oil are suitable for frying. The longer oil is exposed to heat and the more often it is reheated, the more the smoke point decreases.

Baking With Olive Oil

Baking with olive oil instead of butter reduces the amount of cholesterol and saturated fat in your favorite recipes. You need less olive oil than butter when baking. The chart below shows how much olive oil you need when substituting for butter during baking.

Butter	Olive Oil
1 teaspoon	3/4 teaspoon
2 teaspoons	1 1/2 teaspoons
1 Tablespoon	2 1/4 teaspoons
2 Tablespoons	1 1/2 Tablespoons
1/4 cup	3 Tablespoons
1/3 cup	1/4 cup
1/2 cup	1/4 cup and 1 Tablespoon
2/3 cup	1/2 cup
3/4 cup	1/2 cup and 1 Tablespoon
1 cup	3/4 cup

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