



Guide to Asian Cooking Oils

Traditional Asian Oils

Coconut oil has a rich history in the cuisines of Southeast Asia, especially in Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, the Philippines, and India. Because of its high level of saturated fat, use coconut oil sparingly for flavor.

Ghee is a flavorful type of clarified butter that originates in India. It is made by simmering butter to let the water evaporate and brown the milk solids. Then, the solids are filtered out leaving only the liquid fats. This means that ghee is a more concentrated source of fat than butter.

Palm oil is mostly sourced from the rain forests of Southeast Asia and is used in many processed foods today. Although palm oil has historically been used in Asian cuisines, experts now recommend avoiding it because of both its environmental and health impacts.

Peanut oil has a mildly nutty taste and high smoke point. Because stir-frying and other high-heat cooking methods are common in Asian cuisines, peanut oil is a popular choice.

Sesame oil is made from raw or toasted sesame seeds. Oil from raw seeds has a light golden color, neutral flavor, and is generally used for cooking. Toasted sesame seed oil has a darker color, a stronger aroma, and a distinctively nutty flavor. It's most often used as a seasoning or condiment.

Soybean oil is one of the many foods that has been made from soybeans for centuries throughout Asia. Like peanut oil, it also has high smoke point.

Other Cooking Oils

While these oils aren't traditional in Asian cooking, they can work well with many Asian ingredients. Both are particularly high in monosaturated fats, making them healthy choices.

Canola oil, which is extracted from the rapeseed plant, has a mild flavor and high smoke point. This means it's well-suited to frying and sautéing many foods.

Olive oil has its roots in the Mediterranean, but is becoming more widely used in cuisines around the world because of its favorable health benefits.

Choosing Healthy Oils

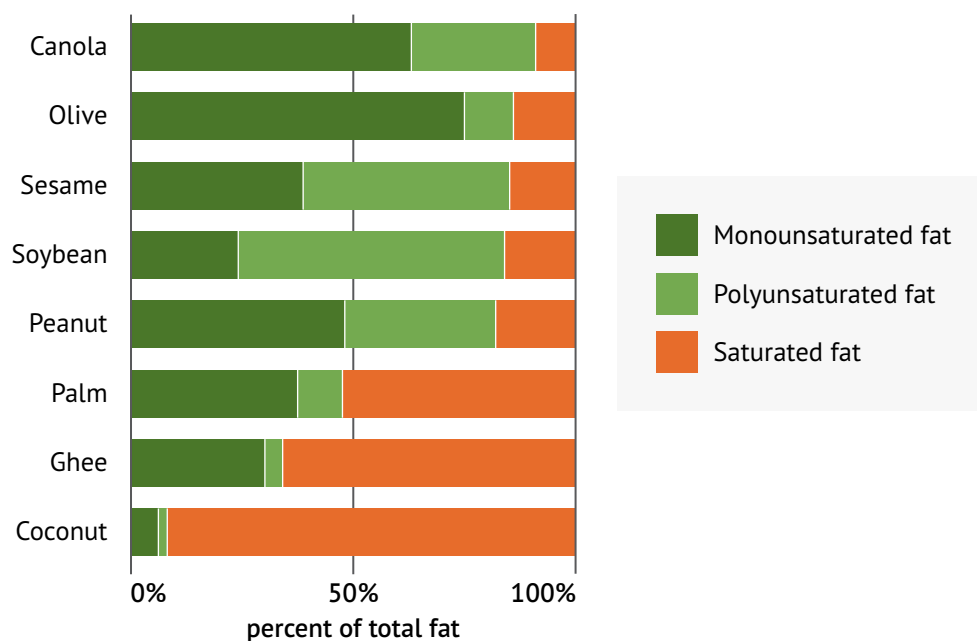
Not all cooking oils are created equal. Although they all have about the same number of calories (100 to 120 calories in 1 tablespoon), there are important health differences between them.

The healthiest cooking oils contain primarily monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats. These fats can help reduce bad cholesterol levels in your blood, which can lower your risk of heart disease and stroke.

Types of Fats in Cooking Oils

This chart shows the percentage of monounsaturated, polyunsaturated, and saturated fats in common cooking oils.

Choose oils with more monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats for everyday cooking. Oils with higher saturated fat should be used occasionally for flavor, or not at all.



- According to Harvard research published in JAMA Internal Medicine¹, replacing just 5% of calories from saturated fat with the same amount of polyunsaturated fat or monounsaturated fat was associated with a 27% and 13% lower risk of death from all causes, respectively.
- In the 2017 Presidential Advisory on Dietary Fats and Cardiovascular Disease², the authors note that replacing saturated fat with polyunsaturated fat can lower the risk of heart disease by 30%, which is on par with what cholesterol-lowering medications can achieve.
- The Advisory also found² that eating more monounsaturated fat, more polyunsaturated fat, and less saturated fat is linked with lower rates of heart disease.

¹ JAMA Internal Medicine. 2016 Aug 1;176(8):1134-45. (Wang DD et al.)

² Circulation. 2017 Jul 18;136(3):e1-e23. (Saks FM et al.)