

Olive Oil 101

Olive oil is the ultimate Oldways pantry staple. It has been the hallmark of the Mediterranean Diet for thousands of years. Olives are now grown in countries and regions around the world with a climate similar to that of the Mediterranean—hot, dry summers and mild, wet winters.

Olives are the fruit of the olive tree. To produce olive oil, the olives are first separated from their stems and leaves, and washed. Then they are crushed into a mash or paste. This paste is pressed (or run through a centrifuge) to separate the oil from the water and sediment.

Types of Olive Oil

Olive oil is graded on taste, acidity level, and processing method.

Extra-Virgin and Virgin Olive Oil: To produce virgin olive oil, the oil is extracted without the use of chemicals or heat—this is also the origin of the term “cold pressed.”

This oil retains its natural flavors, antioxidants, and polyphenols. Extra-virgin is the highest-quality virgin olive oil, meeting both chemical (acidity) and sensory (taste and smell) standards set by the International Olive Council.

Olive Oil: Oil that doesn’t meet the standards for virgin oil is refined by exposure to heat or chemicals.

This refined oil is then mixed with smaller amounts of virgin olive oil for flavor to produce olive oil (sometimes called Pure or Light).



Choosing Olive Oils

Olive oils are a lot like wines. Trying different ones will help you learn what you like best. They have a wide range of flavors, from delicate and fruity to peppery and robust.

The final flavor is affected by factors including the olive type, where the olives are grown and harvested, the weather during the growing season, and the processing.

1. Browse for options within your budget

Wonderful olive oils can be found within different price ranges. Buy what you like, at a price you can afford.

2. Make your choice based on how you'll use the oil

Everyday use: Select a budget-friendly option that you enjoy. It is a myth that the best olive oil is the most expensive, but if a price looks too good to be true, it probably is.

Flavor: Olive oils with a strong flavor tend to be more expensive. To fully experience an oil’s flavor, use it without heating it. Drizzle it over finished dishes, toss it with pasta, or use it in salad dressings.

3. Check the “best by” date

Olive oils last for two years after bottling. Unlike wines, they do not get better with age—fresh is best.

4. Choose the best bottle size

Buy an amount that you’re able to use within a few months.

5. Explore different varieties

To taste diverse flavors, try olive oils from different countries and regions, from both smaller and larger producers.

6. Store it properly

Once you have your olive oil, store it in a cool, dark place, securely sealed with a cap. The four enemies of olive oil are age, heat, air, and light.

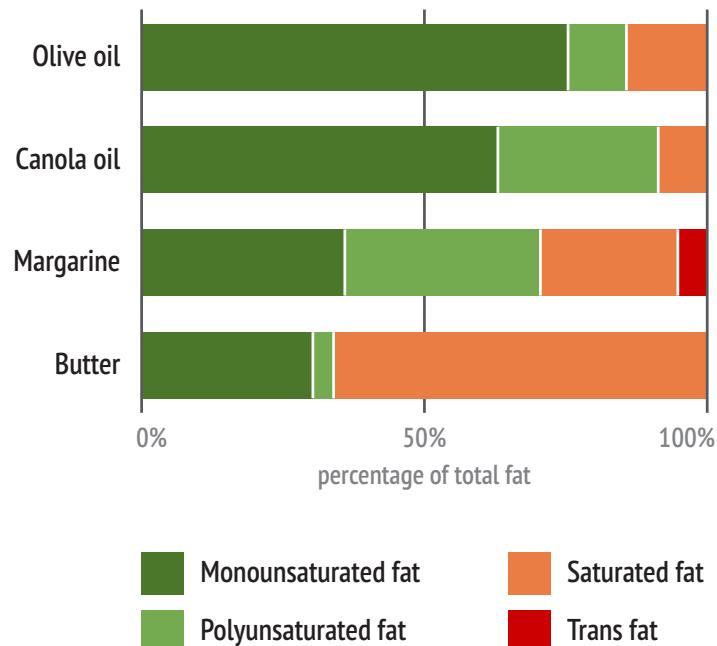
Buying olive oil is investing in your health.

— Fausto Luchetti, Former Executive Director of the International Olive Oil Council

Olive Oil and Health

Not all cooking fats 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 olive oil and other fats.

- The fats in all types of olive oil are 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. They also provide nutrients to help develop and maintain your body's cells.
- Oils rich in monounsaturated fats also contribute vitamin E to your diet. Most Americans need more of this antioxidant vitamin!
- Extra-virgin olive oil is the healthiest choice: it is the least-processed and retains more of the natural antioxidants that are often lost during refining.
- All olive oils are healthy, but as a general rule, the stronger the taste, the higher the level of polyphenols, the more health benefits, and also the higher the price. There is one caveat on the health side—there is no consensus on the optimal level of polyphenols, so at some point, more may not be healthier.



Cooking with Olive Oil

Extra-virgin olive oil is ideal for all types of cooking.

Frying: The medium-high smoke point of olive oil is higher than the temperatures needed for frying. Furthermore, olive oil contains oleic acid and minor compounds that protect the oil from breaking down, even after reuse.

Grilling: To prevent foods from sticking to the grill, marinate or brush them with olive oil before grilling.

Sautéing: Sautéing is an easy, healthy way to bring out flavor. If you're using a non-stick pan, pour the olive oil into the cold pan, then heat the oil. For other cookware, add the oil to a hot pan.

Roasting: Use olive oil to baste roasted meats, and drizzle vegetables with olive oil before roasting to enhance their flavor.

Baking: Using olive oil reduces the amount of saturated fat in your baked goods and also helps keep them moist and fresh longer. And more good news—you need less olive oil than butter when baking.

For more ideas, see [12 Great Ways to Use Olive Oil](#).

Olive Oil Baking Conversions

Use these measurements to replace margarine and butter in recipes.

butter	Olive oil
1 teaspoon	¾ teaspoon
1 tablespoon	2¼ teaspoons
¼ cup	3 tablespoons
½ cup	¼ cup
1 cup	¼ cup + 2 tablespoons
	¾ cup

How to Taste Olive Oil

Picking the best olive oil is a matter of taste—your taste. There's no right or wrong opinion. While you might insist a particular olive oil tastes nutty, a fellow taster might instead sense apples and green peppers.

It's best to sample no more than three or four olive oils per tasting so you don't overwhelm your palate. As you taste each oil, you should notice the fruity taste of the olive.

Following the steps on the next page, record the aromas and flavors you experience. Try incorporating some of the words used by official tasters.



Olive Oil Flavors

There are many varieties of olive oil, each with its own unique taste and odor. The categories below describe the overall flavors of most olive oils:

Full-Bodied & Earthy

Strong flavored, big oils that lack sweetness. Some have a peppery punch as well. Best used with strong-flavored foods.

Fruity, Peppery & Bitter

Have a stronger olive flavor that's often accompanied by a peppery aftertaste. Best used with pasta dishes, robust soups, or as a drizzle.

Fruity & Herby

These are the herbal, grassy oils. Good for most foods, especially with vegetable, pasta, and seafood dishes.

Mild

These subtle oils retain a fruity, buttery flavor. Good for mild dishes such as a simple fish dish or salad dressing.



How the Experts Do It: Official Extra-Virgin Olive Oil Tastings

These taste tests are very serious events governed by rules of conduct set by the International Olive Council. There are two tests to decide the quality of an oil:

1. Chemical tests to determine acidity content and other parameters to ensure quality
2. Human taste tests done by official tasters to determine sensory characteristics

Official tasters make sure there are no defects, then rate the oils without defects using a set vocabulary to assess the flavor principles of extra-virgin olive oil. These terms include:

Almond	Grass	Exotic
Apple	Fruity	Fruit
Chamomile	Herbs	Green pepper
Chicory	Olive leaf	Pear
Citrus fruit	Pine kernel	Vanilla
Eucalyptus	Soft fruit	Walnut
Fig leaf	Tomato	
Flowers	Artichoke	



Sampling Olive Oils

1. Pour and smell

Pour about 1 tablespoon of oil into a small glass. Smell the oil deeply and note its initial aromas. What do you smell?

2. Warm and smell again

Gently swirl your glass to coat the sides with oil. Cup the glass in your hands for about 30 seconds to warm the oil. Smell the oil again, this time sniffing rapidly and deeply. Analyze the aroma. Has it changed?

3. Taste

Take a small sip (about half a teaspoon) without swallowing. Roll the oil around in your mouth for a few seconds. Let the oil touch all areas of your mouth, so you can note the various tastes and sensations.

How does the oil feel in your mouth? What are the flavors? Do you like them?

4. Taste again, with food

Since olive oil is enjoyed with food, it's important to note the effects of food on an oil's flavor. Dip a piece of bread into the oil and try it.

Does the bread enhance the flavor of the olive oil? Does the oil enhance the bread?

5. Clean your palate

Before moving on to the next oil, take a sip of water to clear any lingering flavor.

Try the remaining oils using the above steps. At the end of the tasting, review the flavors and oils you liked and disliked. Decide if you'd like to add any of them to your home pantry.

Olive Oil 1

Aromas

Flavors

Olive Oil 2

Aromas

Flavors

Olive Oil 3

Aromas

Flavors

Olive Oil 4

Aromas

Flavors