

EXTRA VIRGIN OLIVE OIL or “EVOO” FAQ

Olive oil is at the center of the [Mediterranean diet](#). Many people claim that extra virgin olive oil or "EVOO" has important health benefits, but other reputable scientists suggest that these claims are exaggerated. Nevertheless, there is ample evidence that eating fresh vegetables and fruits are certainly more healthy than processed foods.



While we use [olive oil](#) daily in our cooking and tout the health benefits of eating fresh food products, we leave it to the discretion of the reader to form their own opinion regarding the [nutritional benefits of olive oil](#).

Found below are frequently asked questions regarding olive oil and extra virgin olive oil. Many of these answers are included in public forums, but for the sake of convenience these Frequently Asked Questions ("FAQ") are broken down into several key categories and will be updated frequently as new questions arise.

Savvy Shopper Questions

What's the best extra virgin olive oil?

Having sampled hundreds of olive oils from around the world - mainly European - I don't think there is any way to determine the "best" extra virgin olive oil. Aside from personal taste preferences, there are many factors that determine the quality of olive oil:

- Differences in the harvested crop each season;
- Region and soil content where the olives are grown;
- Age of the bottled olive oil
- Bottling process (is nitrogen used to prevent the oil from oxidizing?)
- Is the olive oil a blend of different varieties?

The color of the olive oil has - in my opinion - little to do with the taste or quality of the oil. Personally, I have found that the extra virgin olive oil of Sicily is delightful, but that the crop varies significantly from season to season. Many Italians prefer the olive from Liguria, but production is in the hands of many small producers and quality can vary unless you know the individual farmer.

European consumers tend to prefer olive oils with a slightly stronger finish ("more peppery"). There are many high-quality producers from Italy, Spain and Greece that properly label their products and don't use oils of uncertain providence.

California olive oils are quite good and there are more stringent controls over California production. This is an important consideration if reports that over 70% of oil labeled "extra virgin" sold to the American consumer are fraudulent.

What is the best brand of extra virgin olive oil for everyday use?

Tough question with no obvious "right" answer that would please everyone. I suppose my answer would be conditioned on how you plan to use the extra virgin olive oil. If it is for cooking, I would probably opt for a relatively inexpensive vegetable oil (even though I will often cut butter with olive oil), but do use a quality EVOO for salads, vegetables and pasta.

America's Test Kitchen is a good choice for recommendations, but there are plenty of other reputable sources that make great recommendations. Like wine, the taste of olive oil will change from season to season so it is wise to stick to brands that offer a consistent quality.

If you are choosing something for yourself, I would taste several recommended olive oils before deciding on what works best for your palate. The European olive oils tend to have more of a finishing bite than some of the Californian olive oils, but there are many fine brands from around the world.

Try several and decide for yourself. Who knows, next year's harvest may produce a slightly different taste. Olive oil tastings (I normally can't sample more than six) is a good way to evaluate oils.



How much more expensive is extra virgin olive oil?

The production of extra virgin olive oil tends to be more labor-intensive than the production of other vegetable oils and is, therefore, more expensive. Prices for an authentic 500 ml (17Fl oz) bottle of extra virgin olive oil will vary between US\$20 and US\$40, depending on the producer.

Many reputable supermarkets sell [private-labeled extra virgin olive oil](#) at around US\$10 for a 500 ml bottle. I would be suspicious. Sadly, there is much fraud in the industry and not all oils labeled "extra virgin olive oil" are truly harvested and bottled under the protocols established by the International Olive Council.

Most vegetable oils tend to be half the cost (if not more) than a good quality EVOO. Good quality oils from reputable producers in Italy, Greece and Spain tend to be more expensive. While I wouldn't recommend cooking with extra virgin olive oil, I would certainly pay \$20 or more for a 500ml bottle to use on salads and braised vegetables.

What is the difference between olive oil and extra virgin olive oil?

Simply stated, "extra virgin olive oil" is the highest grade olive oil and consists of natural olive oil, made solely from olives, with the oils extracted by entirely mechanical means (i.e. no heat).

Technically speaking, the minimum official standards for extra virgin olive oil calls for free acidity limits of less than 0.5% to 0.8%. Olive oil, on the other hand, has free acidity in excess of 2%, according to the International Olive Council (IOC).

Cooking with Olive Oil

Does adding olive oil to water prevent spaghetti from sticking together?

It is not necessary to add olive oil to boiling water to prevent spaghetti or any other pasta from sticking. Having lived in Italy and studied with Italian chefs, I have never seen anyone add olive oil to water while the pasta is cooking.

In fact, the oil will probably sit on the surface of the boiling water and only coat the spaghetti or pasta after the pasta is poured into a colander to cool. Quality pasta that is not over-cooked shouldn't stick together. As soon as the still-hot pasta drains in the colander, return the pasta to a bowl or pan and coat with the sauce or olive oil.

What is the "difference" between using olive oil and vegetable oil?

Frankly, there is a huge difference in the taste of most olive oils and vegetable oils that are used for cooking. Generally speaking, Americans tend to use vegetable oils for cooking because these oils have little or no discernable taste and, as such, do not have much of an impact on the flavor of cooked or fried food.

The use of vegetable oils in cooking is often used as a substitute for butter because it smokes at a far higher temperature. When I sauté in butter, I normally add 3/4 Tablespoon of olive oil for each Tablespoon of butter to cut the butter content and raise the temperature a bit higher before it begins to smoke.



Olive Oil

I also use vegetable oils when cooking since they tend to be less expensive. Olive oils can be used, particularly if it has become oxidized (opened more than 6 months), but you generally want to use good olive oils on salads, vegetables or pasta sauces.

Can I tell if olive oil is rancid just by looking at the liquid inside the bottle?

Not really. Most olive oils have a shelf-life of between 1 and 3 years if not exposed to oxygen. In fact, many bottles are capped with nitrogen to prevent the process of oxidation.

Once opened, the bottle of olive oil will begin to oxidize and will begin to gradually lose its flavor.

Most people who purchase olive oil use it frequently on salads and will probably not be aware of any loss in flavor. As a rule of thumb, we will generally discard olive oil (or cook with it) that has been opened for more than a year. Nevertheless, it is highly unlikely to turn rancid unless stored in a hot environment and exposed to the sun.

What is the shelf life of extra virgin olive oil?

Extra virgin olive oil has a shelf-life of two to three years from the harvest date if stored under good conditions: out of the sunlight with a stable temperature. Many premium brands of EVOO are topped with nitrogen before they are sealed to prevent the oil from beginning to oxidize.

Once the olive oil bottle has been opened, we recommend that it be used within a year. Anything left over at that time can be used as a cooking oil. Personally, I use a 500ml bottle of olive oil every six weeks or so.

Health and Nutrition Facts

Is olive oil healthy?

Much is made of the health benefits of consuming olive oil and, in many respects, these benefits appear to be justified, but there continues to be skepticism in some quarters.

Without getting into conflicting scientific evidence that olive oil is healthier than other alternatives, such as butter and other vegetable oils, the [Mediterranean diet](#) seems to be more healthy than others. Perhaps, eating more vegetables and fresh food items is more important than the use of olive oil itself.

Nevertheless, it can be said that olive oil consists mainly of mono-unsaturated fats and that the ratio of mono to polyunsaturated fats in olive oil appears to be recommended by many nutritionists. Some studies have suggested that olive oil polyphenols help to reduce cardiovascular risk and increases HDL or "good cholesterol" levels.

Certainly, other studies are underway which suggest that olive oil may help to prevent other diseases such as cancer and Alzheimer's disease, but far more clinical studies are required to support these claims. In any event, olive oil does appear to have important nutritional benefits and its use is generally recommended as an alternative to promote healthy eating.

Is eating more than 2 tablespoons of olive oil a day unhealthy?

Eating more than 2 tablespoons of olive oil a day is probably not unhealthy, but I have never felt that olive oil was analogous to cough syrup. While there are certainly highly-touted health benefits to using olive oil in your diet, the real benefit probably comes consuming more fresh vegetables.



I certainly wouldn't consider adding 2 tablespoons of olive oil to my regular diet of pills and vitamins. Enjoy olive oil regularly with your salads and eat a Mediterranean diet. Use common sense.

What are the health benefits of extra virgin olive oil?

The health benefits of using extra virgin olive oil in your diet remains a very controversial subject. The proponents of the benefits olive oil suggest that the regular use of olive oil reduces strokes and heart disease and diabetes. Others argue that these "health benefits" are largely exaggerated. Nevertheless, both sides of the debate suggest that eating fresh fruits and vegetables (commonly used with EVOO) are healthier than processed foods.

While a consultation with a doctor is always recommended, the consumption of olive oil appears to lower both blood sugar and blood pressure.

Olive Oil and Hair Growth

Can I use olive oil to stimulate hair growth?

According to "Hair Loss Revolution," there is some evidence to suggest that treating hair with olive oil will help regenerate hair. How compelling this evidence remains a matter of debate, but some studies have shown that "oleuropein, a component found in the leaves of the olive tree, induces anagen hair growth in telogen mouse skin."

What is the scientific evidence to support the use of olive oil in treating hair?

There are several dated studies (2008 and 2010) that suggest that olive oil stimulates hair growth on rats. Whether this carries over to humans is still a matter of conjecture, but anecdotal evidence suggests that it may be helpful.

Any side-effects to treating hair with olive oil?

I am unaware of any side effects of using a moderate amount of olive oil in treating hair.

Next Steps

If you would like to purchase Gourmet Living's exceptional olive oils, please click on the [this link](#). Please note that given transportation costs and the public's justifiable concern over rampant fraud in the olive oil industry, we will only be selling [California Extra Virgin Olive Oil](#) in the U.S. beginning in 2019.

For those interested in our hand-picked selection of balsamic vinegar, truffles and funghi porcini, please visit the [Gourmet Living Store](#).