

## Oils

With Chanukah soon approaching I thought that this would be an appropriate time to talk about oils, especially olive oil.

There are so many varieties of oils on the market it's hard to know which to choose for what recipe, especially considering the difference in price. Below you will find a synopsis of the main oils.

**Nut oils** such as almond, walnut and hazelnut are best used in cold dishes such as salads, as heat destroys their delicate flavor.

**Canola oil** is a trademarked euphemism for a modified form of rapeseed oil, and you have to admit, the name change has worked wonders from a marketing standpoint. Canola is very versatile oil as it is neutral-tasting and very low in saturated fat.

**Corn oil** is the best for deep-frying as it has a very low smoke point (the heat at which fats burn).

**Sesame oil** is an important ingredient in many complex Asian dishes. It is used more broadly in dressings and sauces and with its high smoke point, is great for frying and sautéing. The main reason that sesame oil is specified in recipes is because of its taste, for which there is no substitute.

**Salad oil** is sometimes specified in a recipe. It just means use any edible vegetable oil suitable for a salad dressing; so the choice is yours.

## Olive oil

A quick search on Amazon books for olive oil will reveal how vast the topic is, and explaining the differences between oils is akin to explaining the differences between wines. I will however try to give you a brief overview so you know what to look for when you are purchasing olive oil and understand why there are huge differences in price. As with wine, if you wish you can just ignore the labels and simply follow your taste buds.

Olive oil has always been used in Mediterranean food. It is versatile, requires no refrigeration, has a long shelf life and is suitable for both cold and hot foods.

Olive oil is produced principally in Spain, Italy, Greece, Turkey, Portugal, Morocco and Tunisia. These countries alone account for 90% of world production. As with wine, the flavor can vary dramatically depending on the source, the variety of olive, the soil conditions, weather, etc. Some olive oils are "single-estate oils," that is, oil from a single variety of olive. Others, including most Italian oils, are blends of oils from different types of olives and different countries. The less the olive oil is handled and the lower the acid content, the better the oil.

Olive oil is pressed from ripe olives after they are harvested. Oil from the first pressing is classified as virgin.

**Extra virgin** - כתיית מעולה, simply means an oil from the first pressing that is particularly low in acidity - less than 1%. It is considered the finest oil, pale greenish-yellow in colour it is likely to have the fruitiest and most pronounced flavor, best used for salads, marinades and pasta dishes.

**Virgin olive oil** - כתיית is produced as above but may have as much as 2% acid.

**Fino or fine olive oil** is a blend of extra virgin and virgin olive oils, with an acid content not above 1.5%.

**Pure olive oil** - שמן זית זך or just **olive oil** is made after the first pressing of the olives. More oil is extracted in subsequent operations using a combination of pressure, heat, and chemical solvents. These refined oils may be blended with virgin oil to replace some of the flavor lost in the processing.

How many types of oil you keep on hand is simply a matter of preference. If you wanted to keep your list to two, I would suggest an extra virgin for salads, marinades, serving with bread, and other uncooked uses and a good-quality pure olive oil for low to medium-temperature cooking.

### **How to store your olive oil**

Resist the temptation to place your beautiful bottle of olive oil on the windowsill. Light and heat are the number 1 enemies of oil. Keep olive oil in a cool and dark place, tightly sealed. Oxygen promotes rancidity. Olive oil is like other oils and can easily go rancid when exposed to air, light or high temperatures.

### **Health benefits**

One of the reasons that olive oil is so healthy is due to the high amount of monosaturated fatty acids, mainly oleic acid and antioxidative substances.

Studies have shown that it offers protection against heart disease by controlling the LDL (bad) cholesterol levels, while raising the HDL (good) levels. It has beneficial effect on ulcers and gastritis and it lowers the incidence of gallstones. It also helps to regulate blood pressure and blood sugars and help prevent cancers, especially breast and colon cancer.

## **Recipes with oil**

### **Chili oil recipe**

- 2 cups of olive oil
- 1 tablespoon of crushed red pepper flakes  
(Don't use fresh chilies they will go moldy)
- 1 Sterilized glass jar

Place ingredients in a saucepan over a low heat. Cook for 15 minutes, being careful not to let it reach a simmer or boil. Remove from the heat and let cool to room temperature before straining the oil through a fine mesh strainer into a glass jar. Cover and refrigerate for 7 to 10 days before using. It keeps for months in a cool place.

### **Garlic oil-infused mashed potato**

A really comforting winter dish.

#### **Ingredients**

900g potatoes, peeled and cubed

50g/2oz butter

#### **Garlic-infused olive oil:**

3 fat garlic cloves, halved lengthways

8 tbsp olive oil (the best you can afford)

salt and freshly milled black pepper

Serves 4

#### **Method**

First place the garlic and olive oil in a small saucepan over the gentlest heat possible - a heat diffuser is good for this - and leave for 1 hour for the garlic to infuse and become really soft.

Put the potato in a large saucepan, then pour boiling water over them, add 1 dessert spoon of salt, put on a lid and simmer gently until they are absolutely tender - they should take approximately 25 minutes. The way to tell whether they are ready is to pierce them with a skewer in the thickest part; the potato should not be hard in the centre.

When the potatoes are cooked, drain them and return to the saucepan. Cover them with a clean tea cloth to absorb some of the steam for about 5 minutes, and then using a potato ricer, mash the potatoes (or an electric whisk on a low speed). Add the garlic and oil and whisk until smooth, seasoning well with salt and freshly milled black pepper.

Cooks notes: A potato ricer can be purchased at all good cook shops. It is like a press and forces food through small holes, making perfect, lump-free mashed potato every time. Never use a blender to mash potato as you will end up with glue.