

## **HOW TO CHOOSE AN EXCELLENT EXTRA VIRGIN OLIVE OIL**

There is so much more to Extra Virgin Olive Oil than you might think! We've travelled the length and breadth of Italy to discover the best. And to find out more about what makes a good Olive Oil, Yummy Italy – a professional taster who lives near Bologna- has created this guide to help explain all. Made in Italy, brought to you by Sacla'.



Extra virgin olive oil, aka EVOO, is extremely healthy, but only when the olive groves have been properly maintained and the production process adheres to the criteria set out below. While many olive oils on supermarket shelves may be described as Extra Virgin, the likelihood is that they are mass-produced, contain few polyphenols (the beneficial plant compounds found naturally in plant-based foods that can neutralize free radicals) and the olives may be harvested and processed both within a long-scale time period and at higher temperatures, thereby causing the loss of all their most important characteristics. Mass produced oils are mostly blends from either one or several EU countries, meaning they don't have distinct aroma/flavour characteristics. There is no guarantee of their quality and the cheaper they are, the worse the quality.

So, how do you know when an Extra Virgin Olive Oil is of excellent quality, beneficial to your health and can truly add that oomph to your food?

### **OLIVE GROVES:**

Must be treated with natural and/or organic fertilizers and pesticides, irrigated when necessary and be maintained continuously with tender loving care. Natural pesticides must be used to keep parasites at bay if necessary, as parasites can severely alter the flavour and consistency of the oil.

### **LOCATION:**

Olive groves can be located both at sea-level and in the hills, often up to 500m above sea level, both in dry and humid climates. Italy is abundant with olive cultivation areas and groves can be located in areas with both humid and dry climates all over the country.

### **CULTIVARS (olive types):**

An extra virgin olive oil of excellent quality should be made with either one local (autochthonous) cultivar or a blend of up to 3 or 4 local cultivars.

### **HARVESTING:**

Olives must be harvested when the olives are either still completely green (creating very bitter and piquant characteristics) or just starting to change colour to red (with milder characteristics) and usually from October to January. Harvesting should take place by hand or by using basic mechanical methods (tree-shakers).



<b>PROCESSING:</b>	Olives should be processed by first getting rid of the leaves, washing and pressing the whole olives once only, either with or without the stone. They should also be processed within no more than 24 hours of harvesting and at a temperature of no higher than 30°C. This is known as cold-pressing. The liquid is then centrifuged to separate the oil from the water. The production cycle should be continuous so as to avoid as little contact with oxygen as possible.
<b>STORAGE:</b>	After the olives have been pressed and in order to avoid oxidization, large quantities of oil should be stored in stainless steel containers at very low temperatures and protected with nitrogen to avoid contact with oxygen. Bottling should take place in an oxygen-free environment and bottles should be dark and sealed to protect from air and sunlight and stored in a cool place.
<b>SENSORY CHARACTERISTICS:</b>	Aromas of artichoke, tomato leaf and freshly-cut grass are typical of Italian olive oils. Additional aroma/flavour profiles will vary according to the cultivar(s) used, the type of soil the trees are cultivated on, the altitude of the olive groves and the climate.
<b>TASTE &amp; TACTILE SENSATIONS:</b>	An extra virgin olive oil of excellent quality MUST range from a level of bitterness and pungency (a sting on the back of the throat) of medium to full intensity. When sipped by itself, these may induce a short cough. This means that the oil is extremely high in polyphenols which not only protect the olive on the tree but also neutralize free radicals and keep us healthy. These bitter and pungent characteristics are one of the best indications of an EVOO's antioxidant and anti-inflammatory health benefits including healing sunburn and dry skin, to lowering cholesterol, blood pressure and risk of coronary disease. Some EVOOs may feature some sweetness but this should be present together with the bitter and pungent characteristics. The sweetness is often due to the soil, climate and the olive cultivars.
<b>WHAT ROLE DOES ACIDITY PLAY?</b>	The level of acidity is very important; however this is impossible to understand by simply tasting an oil. Ideally, a chemical analysis should be carried out. An Extra Virgin Olive Oil of excellent quality should contain no more than 0,8% acidity. This can only be known through information provided by the producer or by carrying out an independent chemical analysis.
<b>DEFECTS:</b>	You can tell if an olive oil is defective if it is bright/vibrant green which may mean that chlorophyll has been added (which is illegal), if it smells/tastes of brine, wet straw, smelly bug, feet, cheese, sweat, mould, soil or acetone. All these characteristics mean that the oil has either been processed with olives that are too old, mouldy or have been stored at too high a temperature. Rancid (old and oxidized) oil will smell of salami or old ham fat and should not be consumed.
<b>HOW DO I USE AN EVOO?</b>	In a word, raw. Ideally, it shouldn't be brought to very high temperatures as this can create a toxin called Adelhyde. It can be used for cooking, but preferably at lower temperatures. EVOO



comes into its own when drizzled directly from the bottle over everything, from bread to pasta, cheese, seafood, meat, vegetables and the list goes on. The Mediterranean population literally drizzles it on EVERYTHING.

#### **HOW DO I CHOOSE AN EXCELLENT PRODUCT ?**

Buying from a mass-consumer outlet is no guarantee of quality. Always buy from a trusted source or directly from the producer, after having researched all of the above criteria. Bottles should state where the olive oil has been bottled, the name of the producer, whether it has been produced with one cultivar or a blend. The more information the better. Saclà UK has travelled the length and breadth of Italy, visiting small, artisanal EVOO producers, visiting their olive groves and production areas and has carried out in-depth tastings to guarantee Extra Virgin Olive Oils of excellent quality.