



Tips for Buying Real Extra Virgin Olive Oil

California Oils Are Certified Extra Virgin

BERKELEY, Calif. (April 25, 2011) – With two reports published by the University of California within the last year finding that a great majority of top-selling imported olive oils labeled as “extra virgin” fail to meet the international criteria for extra virgin, many consumers are confused if the oil they are purchasing is real extra virgin olive oil.

American consumers spend more than \$720 million each year for olive oil as demand has soared in recent years as consumers choose to combine great taste and healthier eating choices. According to the California Olive Oil Council (COOC), a vast selection of real extra virgin olive oils are easy to find and at a wide range of price points in specialty stores, grocery stores and supermarkets as well as online. When in doubt, consumers should look for the “California Certified Extra Virgin” seal on California olive oils. The COOC maintains a rigorous certification program that requires the highest standards to be met for an oil to earn the extra virgin seal for fresh, certified California oils.

“Consumers can look for the California certified extra virgin olive oil seal and buy with confidence knowing they are buying real extra virgin olive oil,” said Patty Darragh, executive director of the COOC.

California’s olive oil industry, while young, has quickly proven it can make outstanding extra virgin olive oils. Newly-elected COOC Board President Brendon Flynn of Pacific Farms and Orchards points to the recent COOC Annual Olive Oil Competition that resulted in a record breaking 53 gold and 58 silver medal winners as proof. Flynn added, “This competition demonstrates the high-quality and variety of olive oil being made by artisans to major producers throughout California.” The competition drew 65 member-producers, submitting 143 oils from the current harvest. The list of all the winners can be found at www.cooc.com.

How can consumers be sure they are purchasing the highest-quality extra virgin olive oil? One expert, Ruth Mercurio, managing partner of We Olive, a premier retailer of California olive oil, recommends the following tips:

Check the label!

Does it say extra virgin olive oil? Is there a harvest or milling date, in addition to the best use date? Is the harvest date within 12 months? Extra virgin oil is “best used” within 18 months. Make sure the oil is purchased well in advance of the best used date.

-more-

The Bottle Color Matters

Is the bottle dark to cut down on light exposure? Is it on the top shelf exposed to direct light? Light dramatically shortens shelf life.

Look for the COOC Seal

The COOC seal is the consumer’s assurance that the olive oil is extra virgin, grown in California, and from the most recent harvest. To earn the seal, the olive oil must pass various chemical analysis standards and be taste tested by the COOC’s highly trained taste panel.

Know Your Retailer

Buy from retailers who know the producers, growers and importers. These experts also know how to care properly for the oil. Ask for a taste. Specialty retailers are generous with sampling, as they want the customer to know what they are buying.

Buying Online

Check for the harvest date and always buy from the most recent harvest. Ask before you complete the purchase.

Store It Correctly

Lastly, store extra virgin olive oil from light, air and heat. Use it up once it is open. Rancidity is one of the major culprits—an oil that has been exposed to heat or light or is simply old. So what was once a delicious, fruity, pungent extra virgin olive oil may have been stored improperly, been on store or home shelves too long, open for too long, or sitting next to the stove.

Demand for extra virgin olive oil has soared in recent years, thanks in part to cable food channels, celebrity chefs and the health benefits of the popular Mediterranean Diet. Food savvy American consumers are reaching for extra virgin olive oil to combine great taste and healthier choices.

Michael Tuohy, head chef of The Grange in Sacramento, California and board member of the COOC, states, “Extra virgin olive oil is my butter! I rarely if ever use butter in my kitchen at home. Instead I have come to embrace the virtues and flavors of real extra virgin olive oil.” He added, “While not all olive oils are created equal, each share distinctive aromas and flavors that can be intoxicatingly delicious! In my restaurant, it is often that final little drizzle of extra virgin olive oil that punctuates the dish and brings that “extra something” the guest doesn't expect.”

-end-

About the California Olive Oil Council and its Extra Virgin Seal Certification: Founded in 1992, the California Olive Oil Council is a nonprofit trade and marketing association whose purpose is to promote the growing of olives and production of fresh, high-quality extra virgin olive oil in California. The COOC represents more than 90 percent of olive oil production in California and promotes fresh, quality extra virgin olive oils made throughout the state through grower, producer and consumer education. Home cooks, consumers and chefs all count on the COOC Seal as their guarantee of “extra virgin” olive oil. For more information, visit www.cooc.com.