

## **COMMON PLACES, PREJUDICES AND TRUTH ABOUT OLIVE OIL**

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There are several common places about olive oil: some of them are listed and discussed below.

The olive oil is fatter than the seed oil:

False: all the oils contain the same quantity of fat (99%) and supply 9 kilocalories per gram. It is True, instead, that butter is less calorific than oil, because it contains water (but it has other disadvantages).

The olive oil is not more fattening than the seed-oil but as it is more viscous and tasty, a lower quantity is requested to reach better taste and at the same time one can spare.

The olive oil is heavier, less digestible than other oils:

False: the olive oil is the most digestible of any others. This negative prejudice probably derives from its strong aroma, because of which its taste lasts longer. The olive oil is more digestible than other oils thanks to its high concentration of monounsaturated fat acids, among which there is the oleic acid, useful for hepatobiliary functions. Moreover such a tasty oil makes food more appetizing and by stimulating the gastric juices, it makes them more digestible.

Light oil (used to lose weight) is not fattening:

False: The dietetic oil is filled up with vitamins and other essential elements, fundamental characteristic of the other olive oils, while the light oil is less coloured and it is not so dense, it supplies the same quantity of calories and energy as the other oil (even the seed-oil) and it is wrong to think that a "stronger" colour makes less digestible, heavier oil.

The olive oil is good for our health:

True: The olive oil protects the health of the arteries, retarding brain-ageing, it prevents from atherosclerosis, it makes "bad" cholesterol (LDL) drop and "good" cholesterol (HDL) increase. The so-called arteries-sweeper, with the help of monounsaturated acids contained in the olive oil and it prevents our cells from ageing and from cancer. Furthermore the olive oil, very similar to mother's milk for its acidic composition, has always been advised for babies-weaning and for old people who need calcium against Osteoporosis. Some have also misunderstood the unquestionable nourishing qualities of its animal fats, attributing them to any other kind of animal fats, thus substituting butter with margarine to protect their health. The margarine is obtained by hydrogenating vegetable oils, i.g. making the double bonds of fat acids saturate through hydrogen-absorption. In this way the benefits on heart-diseases through fat mono/polyunsaturated acids, are totally cancelled. Another widespread mistake is that the best behaviour to prevent from cholesterol and to enjoy good health is a lower fat diet: but this lower-fat-food makes both "good" and "bad" cholesterol drop, with an evident loss in the balance of our body-functions.

Not all the oil, known as olive oil is high-quality:

True: The olive oil is blended with rectified olive oil and virgin olive oils different from the so-called "lamp oil", whose acidity can't go over 1,5. An excellent olive oil is the extra virgin olive oil.

The best system for oil-extraction is the traditional pressing.

The modern extraction-system (the so-called centrifugation and percolation system), if well used, can produce better-quality oils than the traditional systems.

The virgin oil, defined as first-pressure, is a particularly good oil:

False: The definition "cold first-pressure" means only that this oil is Virgin but it maybe possible that this oil has not the necessary qualities to be defined as extravergine.

Five kilos olives are needed to produce one litre extra virgin olive oil:

True: The oil obtained by the olives is 20% the original weight, depending also on the cultivar, ripening level, the weather conditions and the extraction-technique.

The oil colour makes its quality:

False: The green colour shading to yellow exclusively depends on the cultivar, the ripening level and the extraction-system. The colour of the oil is the sign of a possible alteration just in case it has reddish reflexes (the oil was damaged because it was not sheltered by light).

The Italian extra virgin is the best in the world:

True and False: In some areas (Tuscany, Umbria, Apulia etc) some' top-quality oils can be obtained thanks to particular cultivar, environment, culture-and-extraction techniques; but it is possible that the same areas produce bad oils if they don't respect the rules top quality production. You can find good-quality oil in several parts of the world.

The cold-pressed oil is a particular kind of oil:

The good rules of working oblige the producers, during all the productive phases, to maintain temperatures as low as possible (the ideal temperature for the traditional system is about 18-22°C or with the centrifugation system, about 25/28°C); it is clear that a completely cold working is impossible because every mechanic process creates heating: if you add very hot water, it can alter the flavor of the product. However, if use low-quality olive, the product will turn out to be low quality as well.

The Dop-oil( Denomination of protected origin) give a better guarantee of quality.

True: Dop oils, denomination given by the U.E., are oils produced in certain areas and must respect strict rules of production which grant top- quality standards. The Dop oils have this denomination in all the countries of the E.U.

The denomination DOC, instead, (of controlled origin) is recognized only inside the country.

The quality of the olive oil depends only the extraction-Technique:

False: Its quality depends on several factors. The most important are: the environment, the cultivar, the agronomic technique the time and the extraction system, the preservation method of the oil. In short excellent oil is obtained by choosing a suitable culture setting and the cultivar, avoiding parasites and collecting the olives in the right time (November); it is better to pick the olives right from the tree and not from the ground; using well-aired plastic boxes to keep them dry, milling them within 24/48 hours and taking care of hygiene, preventing olives from oxygen and checking the right temperature levels.

The picking-time of the olives heavily influences the quality of the oil.

Picking the olives when they have just started the ripening process (end of October), you will get a fruity oil, more bitter and spicy. If you use riper olives, instead, you will have a less fruity and bitter oil. Besides the first is richer in anti-oxidants that give it more stability as to be preserved.

After some months the oil preserved loses its qualitative characteristics:

False: An oil should be consumed within 12-15 months, because after this period it loses its organoleptic qualities (colour, taste, aroma, etc.) however if the oil comes from cultivar rich in polyphenols, if it is well-preserved the oil can keep its best characteristics up to one year and a half.

The best containers for the olive oil are made of terracotta:

False: The best containers are of stainless steel. Even the dull glass containers are very good (they can't be reached by light). It is advisable to have containers with the top and the bottom parts narrower than the central part. This allows the oil to have less contact with the greasy deposit on one side and the air on the other. Plastic containers are not to be used because they easily convey their plastic smell to the oil.

A kilo of oil is more than a litre of oil

True: the specific weight of oil at 15°C is of 0,915-0,919 (Ks/m<sup>3</sup>). Therefore a litre of oil weighs 915-919 Grams.

The olive oil is not good for frying

False: the olive oil is one of the best for frying even if it is certainly more expensive. In fact it can resist high temperatures without burning and producing toxic compounds. There is no evidence that seed-oils are better for frying because they are considered "lighter", as it is usually repeated in advertising.

A morbid appearance means low quality

False: the morbidity in good-quality oils (virgin and extravirgin), is a natural phenomenon that disappears as time goes by, if the oil has not been filtered hard. At the bottom of the container some greasy deposit can be found but it can be easily eliminated by decanting it.

An oil that pricks your throat has a high acid level

False : The acid level of the oil cannot be tasted in our mouths, but it can be determined only through lab-analysis. This "pricking" sensation is a positive characteristic of young products, because it is linked to the its anti-oxidant healthy substances ( polyphenols and tocopherols) and its intensity mainly depends on the cultivar, the extraction technique etc. The presence of these substances gives these oils a fundamental anti-age action.