



## Extra Virgin Olive Oil

*"To eat is a necessity, but to eat intelligently is an art." —La Rochefoucauld*

Contrary to common belief that golden olive oil is mild and dark green olive oil is robust, color is NOT an indicator of either the oil's flavor or quality. In fact, professional olive oil tasters sip from specially designed blue glasses that obscure the color of the oil, preventing preconceptions about the flavor.

Olive oil tasting is an art form similar to wine tasting. All over the world, olive oil competitions are conducted throughout year judging the new harvested olive oils using sensory profiles translated through the art of linguistics, identifying the best of the best.

There are typically 3 styles of olive oil that are judged – mild, medium and robust. The olive variety, maturity of the olive when harvested and the particular process used to extract the oil from its fruit all influence the different styles of olive oil and quality.

Though mildly fruity olive oils are traditionally used for preparing light sauces, or drizzling over delicate white fish, an intensely aromatic, bitter olive oil starts with the sensory experience of taste and smell using specialized terms to help identify its unique characteristics. Create your own sensory evaluation using the following steps that focus the attention on a specific positive attribute of the oil. Make sure to have some mineral or sparkling water and slices of Granny Smith apple close by, as these are traditional palate cleansers between olive oil tastes.

- Pour about a tablespoon of olive oil into a small tapered glass.
- Hold the glass in one hand and use your other hand to cover the glass while swirling the oil to release its aroma.
- Uncover the glass and inhale deeply from the top of the glass. Think about whether the aroma (**fruitiness**) is mild or strong. With a good extra virgin olive oil, you should be able to detect the fresh, fruity aroma of the olive. You should detect aromas of olive, fresh cut grass, aromatic herbs or fresh fruit – all positive attributes of a good quality olive oil.
- Now take a “slurp” of the oil; this is done by sipping a small amount of oil into your mouth while “sipping” some air as well. Slurping emulsifies the oil with air that helps to spread it throughout your mouth - giving you the chance to experience every nuance of flavor with only a small amount of oil. The fruity characteristics you may notice include nutty, buttery and other ripe flavors as well as a fuller spectrum of green fruity notes. Close your mouth and breathe out through your nose. This “retronasal” perception will immediately express new flavor notes and determine the amount of **bitterness** on the tongue. Bitterness is an acquired taste. As anyone who has ever tasted an olive right off the tree can attest, bitter is a prominent taste in fresh olives. Oil made from riper fruit will have little to no bitterness where oil made from greener fruit can be distinctly bitter.
- Finish by swallowing the oil and noticing if it leaves a stinging sensation in your throat. This **pungency** is a positive characteristic of olive oils - a peppery sensation that can be very mild (just the tiniest tingle) or intense (enough to make you cough), detected in the throat that is a chemical irritation, like the hotness of chilies.

Once you have tasted an olive oil using the sensory evaluation, go ahead and experiment by pairing the olive oils with foods. Olive oil will bring a new dimension of flavors and textures to foods as it will also bring more life to the oil itself. Wine presents a good analogy: a wine that is great with food might not be appropriate as an aperitif. Olive oil is the same: sometimes an olive oil that seems too pungent and bitter by itself or with bread, is perfection itself when used to top a hearty white bean soup.