**Useful Tips for Selecting the Right Type of Extra Virgin Olive Oil**

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I am frequently asked for tips to select the highest quality of olive oil. The following is a few criteria the consumer can apply on the olive oil aisle and at home to select the right type of olive oil. The examples used here are from our own brand.

1. Ensure the label reads **Extra Virgin Olive Oil (EVOO)**. Avoid terms such as Pure, Light, Authentic etc. These are marketing terms and they do not mean anything in terms of quality.
2. Avoid buying a transparent bottle. One of the enemies of olive oil is light. A transparent bottle allows light to be absorbed and destroys some of the properties of EVOO. Look for and purchase **dark glass bottles or tin cans** which shield the olive oil from sunlight. Plastic containers should also be avoided.
3. **Buy olive oil which has been filtered**. Although olive oil tastes best when fresh immediately after production, a bottle with unfiltered olive oil which has been sitting on the supermarket shelve for a period will contain a sediment of vegetable matter. The sediment will accelerate the oxidation of the olive oil.  Filtering helps maintain stability and preserves the healthy qualities.
4. The term First Cold Press is a term left from an era of older technology. Certain producers still use it for marketing purposes only. Most mills have been modernized and the right term to look for is **Cold Extraction**. Extra Virgin Olive Oil is extracted without the application of heat in a 2-phase or a 3-phase decanter.
5. Look for and insist that the **Year of Harvest** is clearly shown on the label e.g., 2022 which in the Northern Hemisphere means that the harvest period is between early October and late December.

 

1. The **Production Date and the Expiration Date** should be clearly indicated on the label. By Production Date we normally refer to date of bottling which should be a few days after harvest. Avoid buying an olive oil with production date far apart since the harvest period. The reason is the consumer does not know the conditions the olive oil has been kept in bulk. The Expiration Date should be 18-24 months since the harvest time.

 

1. Although blending for olive oil is an acceptable practice, it is preferable to use **monovarietal olive oils**. In this case ensure the variety of olives is indicated on the label.

 

1. A bottle of olive oil should **include a story** starting from where the olives were cultivated to how and who distributed it. As a minimum the following information should be on the label:
2. Place or region where the olives where cultivated.
3. The name and location of the mill where the olive oil was made.
4. The name of the establishment where the olive oil was bottled and packaged. In Europe packaging establishments are given a designation by the responsible ministry which is unique to the country they belong to e.g., “EL 40 177” (Greece).
5. The name of the exporter
6. The name and information about the importer e.g., address, website and email address.
7. The name and information of the distribution company.

  

1. Responsible producers go the extra mile and provide the **Chemical Characteristics** as of the time of packaging.

 

Look for acidity levels which should be lower than 0.3% although the limit is 0.8%. The lower the number the better. Ensure the peroxide concentration, absorption values and oleic acid concentration are within specifications.

1. **Trust your own senses**. The above criteria should be able to provide you with the green light to go ahead and purchase the product. When you take the product home you should try a quick sensory test. Treat the olive oil like you would normally test wine. Pour some in a glass, hold it in your hands to warm it up, shake it and then do the “four Ss”. Sniff, Sip, Swirl and finally Swallow. Look for aroma, bitterness and especially the warmth at the back of your palate, the so called “kick”. Do not be concerned if it makes you cough a bit, this is always a good sign and signifies presence of antioxidants. A good quality olive oil should smell fruity with mild scents of herbs. A “grassy” aroma is an indication of a fruity and early harvested olive oil and an indication of freshness. The “kick” is an indication of higher concentration of polyphenols i.e., antioxidants. Olive oil should be mildly bitter and pleasant when tested and consumed.

If you are considering an organic EVOO there are a few additional aspects to look for. For organic EVOOs originating from the European Union it is mandatory that the label displays the following two seals.

 

In addition, depending on the country of origin a text similar to “Certified organic by DIO GR-BIO-01” should be clearly displayed under the importer’s name.

 

If you want consistency in the food, when you find the right type of extra virgin olive oil stick to it and continue to use it when cooking.