



Is Your Extra Virgin Olive Oil a Fake or the Real Thing?

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Extra Virgin Olive Oil: Not So Virgin

Studies on the Mediterranean Diet have shown that extra virgin olive oil (EVOO) is one of the healthiest culinary fats on the planet. EVOO is high in polyphenols that provide anti-inflammatory and antioxidant effects in our bodies and for the oil itself. EVOO offers protection for the heart, gut, brain and some studies show it provides protection from cancer. This has led medical researchers, nutritionists and other health professionals to recommend it as one of the top fats for cooking and other food prep.

But, what if the extra virgin olive oil you are using is not quite that – virgin? Extra virgin olive oil comes from the first press of the olives and is free of additives. It is considered “Liquid Gold.” A recent 60 Minutes report highlighting millenniums-old olive oil fraud revealed that a large percentage (75% – 80%) of the EVOO sold in the US has been adulterated with cheap seed oils, chlorophyll and sometimes even solvents and pesticides. Experts in the olive oil industry say that EVOO is a very lucrative business, 3 times more lucrative than cocaine. So, like any other valuable commodity, greed can breed dishonesty.

If you missed it, you can read the 60 Minutes report about EVOO [here](#).

So, what can we do to avoid falling victim to EVOO fraud?

Most importantly, know the actual source of the EVOO you are buying. Also, be aware that really cheap EVOO (< \$10 per liter) is likely not 100% virgin olive oil or high quality EVOO. But, this doesn't mean you have to pay a fortune for great olive oil. **Tom Mueller**, author of the book, *Extra Virginity: The Sublime and Scandalous World of Extra Virgin Olive Oil*, provides a continually evolving list of recommended pure EVOO's and their sources on his website [Truth In Olive Oil](#).

In addition, Consumer Labs is performing an independent test of EVOOs which will be published in Spring 2016. Stay tuned to this blog as we will provide the results of the Consumer Labs report as soon as it is available.

In the meantime, here are some quick tips to make sure your precious dollars are buying the real deal.

What to look for when buying high quality EVOO

- Make sure it is from a reputable source that has been tested in a certified lab for purity. Find a quality EVOO store/supplier in your town or community.

- Look for a supplier or store that lists the FFA (free fatty acid) and polyphenol content of the oils. Polyphenol content can range from <100 up to 800 ppm. The higher the polyphenol number the more health benefits, however, oils with polyphenol levels >400 may be too bitter or peppery for some taste buds. A polyphenol content of around 300 – 400 and an FFA level of <0.2 is considered very good.
- Like most oils, EVOO goes rancid with age. Look for bottles that list a “date of harvest” and try to buy oil from this year’s harvest. If a “date of harvest” is not listed, look for a “best by” date. According to Tom Mueller, “best by” dates are usually within 2 years of the bottling date. Buy as close to the bottling date as possible.
- Buy oil in dark colored glass bottles to protect it from light.
- Notice how it was stored in the store where you purchase it. Example: Is it stored in clear (not dark) glass or plastic bottles in bright light next to a window? Or, is it stored in “fustis” (foos’-tees) which are mini stainless steel vessels that protect the oil from light and heat?
- If possible, buy from a source where you have the opportunity to taste it before you buy.
- Buy a quantity you will use up quickly. Oil sitting under a large amount of oxygen in a half used bottle can go rancid more quickly.

For more info on how to buy great olive oil, [click here](#).

Sources of truly “virgin” EVOO

You can find Tom Mueller’s EVOO Recommendations From Around the World [here](#) and his Supermarket EVOO Recommendations [here](#).

If you live in the Triangle area of North Carolina, you can purchase top shelf EVOO at several extra virgin olive oil stores supplied by Veronica Foods of California (one of Tom Mueller’s recommended suppliers). Stop in one of these stores for a fun and unique tasting experience:

- [Peak Olive Oil and Vinegar](#), Cary, NC
- [Midtown Olive Oil and Vinegar](#), Raleigh, NC
- [Blue Sky Olive Oil and Vinegar](#), Chapel Hill, NC

How to Store EVOO

So, you’ve invested in primo EVOO, here’s how to protect it once you get it home.

Protect EVOO from its 3 enemies – light, heat and oxygen:

- Store it in a cool, dark place like a pantry or cabinet with a solid door.
- Store it with an air tight lid to keep oxygen out.
- Store it away from heat (don’t leave it on the counter next to your stove).

Tips for Cooking with EVOO

In spite of what you may have heard about EVOO's low smoke point, olive oil experts state that the polyphenols and high levels of monounsaturated fatty acids in high quality EVOO protect the oil against oxidation when heated. EVOO can safely be used in low to medium heat cooking and even in higher heat cooking for short term applications like stir fries.

Try these tips from cookbook author and chef, Rebecca Katz when cooking with EVOO:

- Heat your pan first.
- Add EVOO and allow it to heat until it shimmers. This is when to add your food.
- Once you add the food, the smoke point drops precipitously.
- According to Chef Katz, if you follow these guidelines, you would have to be working at an industrial-sized range with considerably higher heat capabilities to exceed the smoke point for EVOO.
- EVOO is safe to use for oven roasting. This is indirect heat so it does not present a risk of reaching EVOO's smoke point.

For more information about the virtues of Extra Virgin Olive Oil, check out these sources:

- [Olive Oil Times](#)
- [UC Davis Olive Center](#)
- [Australian Olive Association](#)