

Premium Blend

Newsletter

Have you been using fake Olive Oil by mistake?

Last year Australians consumed 45 million litres of olive oil, up from just under 30 million litres in 2001. But what's really in your oil, and why should you care?



Wander down a supermarket aisle and you'll see the shelves stacked with olive oils labelled extra virgin, light, pure, natural, premium and superior. Their origins are usually Italy, Greece and Spain and also a handful of Australian produced oils. All this choice is driven by research that shows that olive oil is good

for us, but, and this is a big “but”, the health benefits depend on the quality of the oil.

A lot of what consumers think they know about olive oil turns out to be wrong. ‘Pure’ and ‘Light’ doesn't mean a low calorie oil. ‘Natural’, ‘Superior’ and ‘Premium’ are meaningless. And ‘Extra Virgin’? What does it mean?

Extra Virgin Olive Oil is the natural oil freshly squeezed from olives processed as soon as possible after picking without the use of any chemical or excessive heat, thus preserving its health benefits and flavour. If you want the healthy oil it's got to be extra virgin: the *fresher and fruitier* the better. That slight pepperiness you get at the back of the throat when you taste good oil is evidence of its anti-oxidant and anti-inflammatory properties.

Imported olive oils routinely fail laboratory tests and refined olive oil often masquerades as extra virgin olive oil adulterated with seed and vegetable oils.

So what's the truth? The truth is that Australia has for a long time been a dumping ground for old, deodorised, refined and heated oils. According to Tom Mueller a large amount (98%) of the low cost oils being imported from the Mediterranean have faults that are completely ignored or are masked by heating, deodorising or mixing. Tom Mueller is the author of *Extra Virginity: The Sublime and Scandalous World of Olive Oil* and was also in Adelaide recently filming a documentary on olive oil.

The reason this occurs is simple economics: Olive Oil isn't cheap to produce so if you see low cost imports in your supermarket there's a high probability that it's old, has lower polyphenols (you want these!), lower tocopherols (and these) so it's not the same as the fresh stuff.

Summary

- Buy the freshest available
- Bargain prices are an excellent indicator that what's in the bottle isn't top quality. Good extra virgin olive oil is expensive to produce.
- Avoid oils labelled Light, Extra Light, Premium and Superior.
- Buy oil in dark bottles and don't buy more than you will use quickly

Reference: Bogle D, “*Losing our Virginity*”, The Advertiser, 12th May 2012