

we've been thinking about olive oil all wrong

myths, mistakes, and how to buy better (yes you can cook with it!)



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hi friends,

Nonnas and yayas know this intuitively - a big drizzle of extra virgin in the pan at the plate makes everything taste better, and has long been associated with good health. They're not worried about smoke points or calories, but somehow in the few decades, we've started to question them. Today I want to get us back on the page.

I'm just coming back from a week at [Fattoria La Violla](#), an organic, biodynamic farm in Tuscany, and last year at food school we studied olive oil while visiting farms in Greece, Portugal, and other parts of Italy. Speaking with these producers directly revealed the wide gap between how many of us were taught to consider olive oil home kitchens (myself included), and the truth from the people who actually grow, cook, and eat with the good stuff every day.

In this message I'll break down the 5 olive oil myths I hear most often, show you to spot a solid bottle amongst a shelf full of options, and teach you how to preserve the quality as long as possible at home. At the end I'll finish by telling you why I think extra virgin olive oil is poised to be the next sought-after ingredient for curious home cooks.



Giulia and I exploring the olive groves at Fattoria La Violla

When my friend [Giulia Crouch](#) texted to see if I wanted to join her at La Vialla, it was an easy yes. She'd just earned her olive oil sommelier certification (yes, you read that right), and a week immersed in the olive trees at the farm was the perfect way to celebrate. Giulia is far ahead of me in the olive oil game - besides now being a certified expert, she's built a career as a food journalist inspired by her Sardinian grandpa's Mediterranean style of eating. I highly recommend her olive oil account [@theevo](#) for many more evoo tips and tricks, and her Substack [Fed Up](#) all about dismantling diet culture - her latest "[How to be a Mediterranean grandma](#)" is an especially fun and useful one.

Before we get into all of the myths and tips, let's clarify a few things:

Polyphenols = antioxidant-rich plant compounds found in things like berries, spices, dark chocolate, and extra virgin olive oil. They're good for heart health, they feed gut bacteria and promote a healthy microbiome, they reduce inflammation and can lower your risk of cancer and Alzheimers, and can even slow signs of aging.

Extra virgin olive oil (aka evoo) = the highest quality juice extracted from pressed olives. Full of flavor and polyphenols.

Olive oil (not extra virgin) = an ultra-processed product refined with heat and chemicals. Little to no flavor and no polyphenols. A completely different thing than evoo!



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Did you know this?

Extra virgin olive oil is better thought of as a freshly squeezed fruit juice. It's full of healthy compounds and tons of flavour, and like any fresh product, declines in both over time.

Olive oil on the other hand is a refined, industrial product treated with heat and

chemicals. It's dull and flat in flavour and contains no polyphenols (beneficial compounds found in EVOO that are so good for our health).

People think EVOO needs to be reserved for drizzling and shouldn't be cooked with but this is absolutely untrue. With its high smoke point and protective polyphenols, it has great oxidative stability making it a perfect cooking oil.

[#oliveoilsommelier](#) [#evoo](#) [#oliveoilbenefits](#)

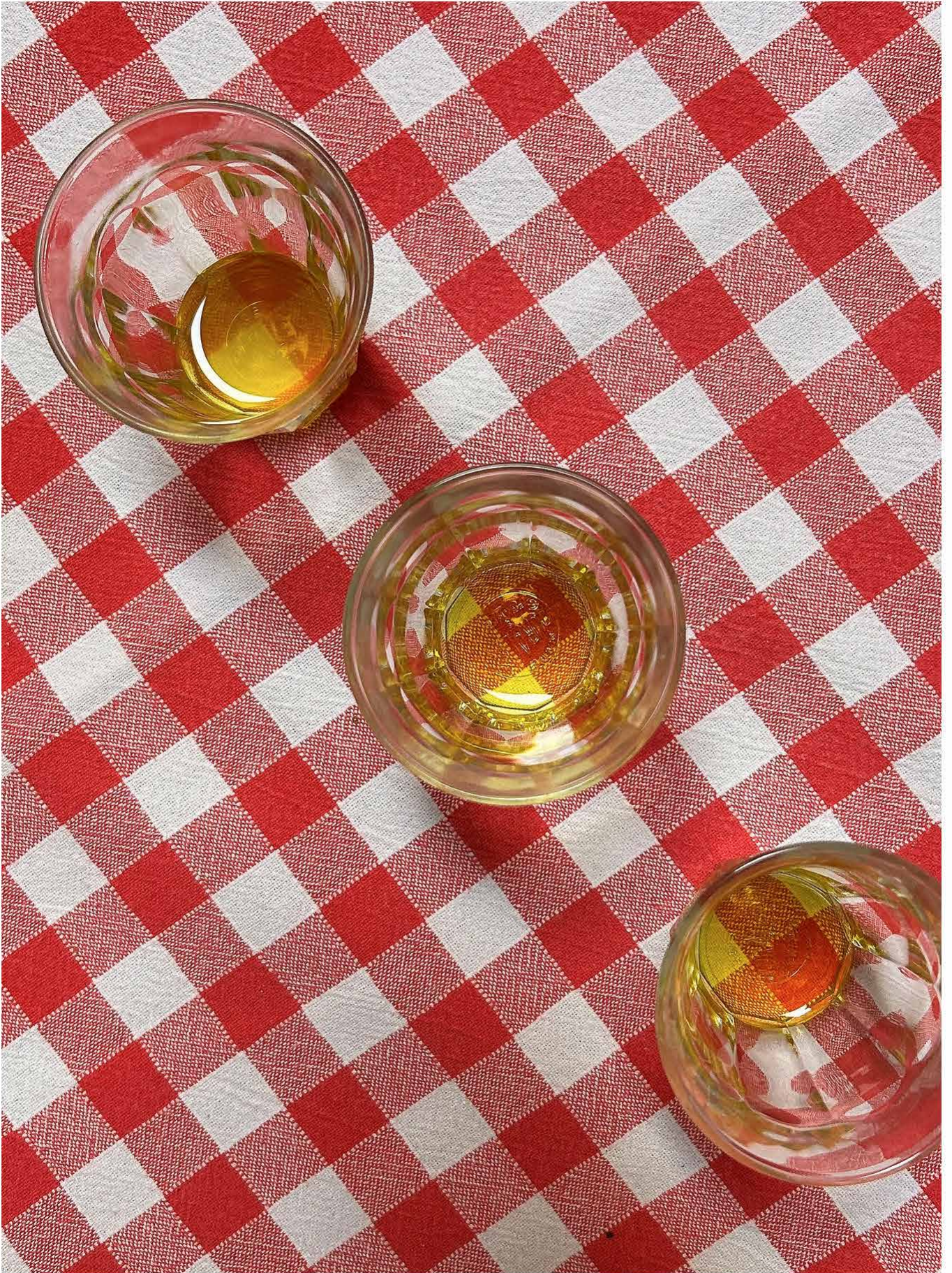
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On our first full day at the farm, they generously organized a tasting of the latest harvest extra virgin oils. Like the true food nerds we are, we sipped and discussed flavor profiles of each, chatting along the way about the misconceptions we've uncovered as we've learned more about this product. I think the fact that an olive tasting is even a thing already dispels a few of the top myths!

Top 5 myths I hear about extra virgin olive oil:

#1) It's fatty: Ok yes, it is a fat, but I think what people are really concerned about here are the health implications and the potential contribution to weight gain. Even though it is high in monosaturated fat (the good kind - like in nuts and avocados), which helps lower LDL cholesterol, supports heart health, and can actually assist in weight loss, a [2025 Harvard study](#) even revealed that an increased intake of evoo can have the opposite impact on body weight compared to other fats such as vegetable oil, butter, and margarine.



#2) You can't cook with it: Completely untrue. I think this one has to do with what we've heard about smoke points, and basic olive oil does have a lower smoke point than fats such as vegetable or sunflower oil. But what we don't consider is that a quality evoo's smoke point is typically well above 400F (deep-frying occurs at 350-375F), so it's perfectly suitable for a normal home cook (what do you think the nutritionists were doing!?). Even better, the antioxidants in extra virgin oil prevent oxidation in a way that no other cooking oils can, making it one of the safest fats to bring up to a high heat.

In my kitchen, the only times I might choose to use an oil other than evoo is when I want a truly neutral flavor (often Asian dishes, when I'd use a sunflower oil or similar) or if I want a distinctly different flavor, like sesame or coconut. If you're worried about price and don't want to "waste" an expensive bottle of evoo on everyday cooking, check out the link below where I talk about how to pick a solid grocery store option.

#3) There's one for cooking and one for drizzling: following up from the above, you can cook with all extra virgin olive oil. You've probably seen brands with multiple oils for multiple uses (you know who I'm talking about) and I think this is mostly a marketing strategy to sell more product. Either they've found a way to sell you their lower quality oil (labeled as extra virgin) and market it as "for high heat cooking," or they're all decent oils but they've convinced you that you need more than one.

A normal home kitchen only needs one solid extra virgin bottle, but if you're like me and really into this stuff, try distinguishing your oils by price and taste instead. Maybe you got an extra-special expensive bottle and want to save it just to drizzle on salads that makes sense. Or your bottles have different flavor profiles that you want to pair with different foods - read on to the next myth...



#4) It all tastes the same: Nope! This has been one of the most fun things to learn about as I've gotten to know more about evoo. Depending on where the oil is from and when the olives were harvested, evoo can range in bitterness, fruitiness, and pungency. Just like with wine, you might pair a bold oil with a hearty soup or grill meat, or a more delicate oil with simple white fish to avoid overpowering it. If you have two bottles of extra virgin at home, try them side by side and see if you can spot differences.

#4) The best oils are green: Just like with flavor, evoo color varies from pale yellow to darker green depending on the climate, location, and time of harvest. There's no correlation associated with the color, in fact professional judges taste oils from dark colored bottles just so that they can't be influenced by the shade of what's in their glass.

#5) It lasts forever: This one's the opposite to wine - extra virgin olive oil is better the younger it is. The flavor is freshest and the healthy polyphenols are most prevalent immediately after harvest, and over time those will degrade as the bottle sits on supermarket shelves or in your kitchen. Eventually even the best oils will oxidize, so use yours within a year or so from the harvest date, and follow the tips later in this message to store them properly at home.



Carmen Sánchez Garcia, another evoo sommelier, guiding us through the La Violla oils

How to spot the best evoo on the shelf:

Ok, now that we're up to speed on the realities of evoo, let's talk about how to choose your bottle. When you're looking at an aisle full of oil at the store, the key is to distinguish the real extra-virgins from the industrial refined styles:

- **Look for the words "extra virgin"** - this is an official quality designation, and if the brand earned it they won't want to hide it. If it's not there, it's likely a refined oil.
- **Find the harvest location** - a good bottle will name the farm, or at least the region where the olives were grown. "Europe" is not specific enough.
- **Consider the harvest date** - listing the harvest date on the bottle shows that the oil is less likely to be an industrial version, and by choosing the most recent harvest you'll get the freshest oil with the most flavor and benefits.
- **Choose the right packaging** - glass or metal will preserve the oil much better than plastic, and a dark color protects it from light while it sits on grocery shelves (if you buy direct from a producer they'll know how to store it properly, so the color is less of a concern).

Other factors to consider:

- **Flavor profile** - as I mentioned earlier, evoo varies in flavor from spicy, grassy, fruity, or even floral. I hope tasting notes will become more common on bottles as evoo gains interest, but right now it's fairly rare to see these listed on the bottle. However, there are a few tricks you can use to get a decent idea of what you're tasting:
 - Search the typical flavors from the location of harvest. Again just like wine, different olive regions of the world have distinct flavor profiles that are well documented. For example, evoo in Tuscany is known for being peppery and grassy, while down south in Puglia it's more delicate and buttery.

- Consider whether it was an early or late harvest. This is a harder one, especially if you aren't familiar with their growing season, but generally e harvested early (early October-ish) will be more bitter and pungent, while in the season (November onwards) is more mild and smooth.
- Ask someone! If you're buying a nicer bottle, depending on where you're shopping the staff who stock it might actually know about the producer, even let you have a taste.
- **Price** - I know, evoo can be expensive, but there are often solid grocery store options which fit the above criteria (extra virgin, harvest details, dark packaging at prices not far above the industrial competitors. In the UK, Giulia was impressed by Lidl's Puglian Deluxe Extra Virgin Olive Oil at only £5.49 for 500ml. In the US I'm often hearing about the Costco Kirkland Select Extra Virgin Olive Oil at \$12.99 for a giant 2L bottle (I don't love that it's plastic, so I'd only buy if you're going through it quickly). Have a look through your local grocery shelves with these criteria in mind and let us know what other good options you're finding!



A couple of specific EVOO recs from me:

- **For those in the UK/EU:** [Fattoria La Violla](#) - obviously they're getting a shout here, but it's not just my bias - their "La Violla" evoo received top awards at the 2025 Berlin Global Olive Oil Awards, including the Platinum award for high polyphenols and Gold for organic quality. It's £35 for two 750ml bottles (like wine bottles).
 - **For those in the US:** [Fat Gold](#) - I've heard great things about this Californian brand, including their feature in the first chapter of Samin Nosrat's new cookbook. You can tell by their [detailed evoo guide](#) that they really know and care about producing an excellent quality oil for their customers. They sell single tins or jars and in select stores, or subscriptions that come with fun magnets and a monthly zine. (A surprising bonus - as I was researching this, I realized their owner Kari Tomajan graduated from the same gastronomy Master's program in Italy as
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How to protect your evoo at home:

Now that you know the basics of good evoo and have your bottle in hand, we just need to preserve that fresh quality for as long as possible at home. The main enemies of extra virgin olive oil are heat, light, and oxygen, so:

- Do not keep the bottle by the stove (heat)
- Do not keep the bottle near a window (light)
- Do not use one of those open drizzly tops (oxygen) unless you plan to finish the bottle quickly
- DO keep the bottle in a cool, dark place, like in a cabinet or pantry
- If you absolutely must have easy access evoo on the counter for cooking, just pour a small amount in a dark glass or ceramic container and keep the rest protected in the original bottle in the pantry

After a week surrounded by olive oil, I'm more convinced than ever that the nonnas and yiayas were on the right track. Giulia and Carmen, two women who have built at least part of their careers around extra virgin olive oil, both told me they're hearing more and more interest from curious home cooks who want to taste and learn more about it. Quality extra virgin olive oil hits so many of the themes consumers care most about right now - from gut health, to longevity, to flavor rooted in history and place that it's easy to see how it could become a sought-after pantry staple. In the same way we've learned to appreciate the craft and nuance behind a special bottle of wine, it seems that we're starting to do the same with evoo.

