

HEALTHY COOKING OILS

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A good quality cooking oil is an important component of meal preparation and a healthy diet. With so many oils available on store shelves, selection can feel confusing and overwhelming. Oils have various levels of fat, come in a variety of shades and colors, and react to heat differently. In addition, flavors differ - some are rich and robust, others are more neutral. Olive oil, in particular, differs by the variety of olive used, where it was grown, when it was harvested, and how it was processed.

TIPS:

- To learn more about the difference in taste of olive oil and other cooking oils, stop into a specialty food shop that provides samples. And for grocery store brands, taste a sample at home prior to using in a recipe.
- When looking at and tasting oils, look for similarities to the plant or food from which they are made. For example, good quality olive oil can range in color from gold to some shade of pale green and will have a faint olive or grassy aroma and a slight peppery flavor or bite to it.

Which Oil to Use?

Cooking oils have different smoke or flash points, meaning they are stable up to a certain heat. Paying attention to an oil's smoke point is like selecting the right tool for the job. When an oil overheats, it begins losing its nutrient value and raises the risk of oxidation.

As a general guide -

- For higher heat cooking or baking:
 - coconut oil
 - avocado oil
 - butter / ghee
 - animal fats
 - lard
 - sesame oil (refined)
- For uncooked foods (salad dressings, sauces or drizzling):
 - avocado oil
 - extra virgin olive oil
 - sesame oil (unrefined)
 - walnut oil
 - flaxseed oil
- For low to medium heat cooking:
 - avocado oil
 - coconut oil
 - virgin olive oil
 - sesame oil (unrefined)

Buying Tips:

The market is flooded with oils that are not pure or of the highest quality and the “best buy” is not always the best choice. Many oils are imported and blended, not actually grown and produced where they are bottled.

For example, some producers in Italy are known to create less expensive blends with oils imported from other parts of Europe. The labels state “packed in Italy” or “bottled in Italy” but those oils may or may not include any oil from Italy and the quality is uncertain. For the freshest, best quality oils, choose those that are grown and bottled in the same place.

It is worth the effort to find good quality oils for both flavor and health reasons. Here are a few buying tips:

- Packaging is key - choose dark colored bottles to keep out light and oxygen.
- For best quality, look for the words “extra virgin”, “cold-pressed”, “expeller pressed”, and preferably, “unrefined” on the label.
- Avoid oils that state “olive oil” (rather than “extra virgin” or “virgin”), “light” or “pure” on the labels. These oils have been chemically processed.
- Avoid all highly processed oils, such as hydrogenated or partially-hydrogenated oils.
- To maximize freshness, buy oils in smaller quantities.
- Look for bottles that provide “best by” dates or “date of harvest”.
- Do not use any oils that have a rancid smell or taste.

Some grocery store brands you may like include:

- California Olive Ranch Everyday Extra Virgin Olive Oil
- Gaea Extra Virgin Olive Oil
- Chosen Foods Avocado Oil
- Carrington Farms Coconut Oil
- Nutiva Organic Coconut Oil
- Spectrum Sesame Oil (Expeller Pressed)
- Spectrum Walnut Oil (Expeller Pressed)

Interested in knowing which olive oils garner the highest ratings in world competition? Check out the results from the [New York International Olive Oil Competition](#).

Storage Tips:

Heat, light and oxygen are not friendly to healthy cooking oils! To avoid oxidation and spoilage -

- keep all oils in dark, tightly sealed containers, preferably glass
- store in a cool, dark place
- place nut and seed oils in the refrigerator

For further information on using healthy cooking oils in your kitchen, see this guide - [10 Healthy Cooking Oils](#)