

# The Good Oil

A guide to buying the right olive oil for you

Australian consumers now have access to many different types of olive oils, with labels that can vary significantly between and within brands. 'Extra virgin olive oil', 'pure', 'extra light'—with so many different choices, it can be hard to know what these labels mean. This guide helps clarify the various types of olive oils and the terms commonly used on olive oil packaging, to help you buy products with confidence.

The two common types of olive oil are **virgin olive oil** and **refined olive oil**.

## Virgin olive oils

Virgin (or 'pressed') olive oil is extracted from olive fruit by mechanical or physical means. Chemicals or heat aren't used to extract the oil. This physical production process ensures that the oil is not altered and that it retains its nutritional value. The terms used on labelling for pressed olive oil are 'extra virgin' and 'virgin' olive oil.

### Extra virgin olive oil

Extra virgin olive oil is the fresh juice from the olive and is considered to be the highest grade olive oil. The main determinants are low acidity and the absence of flavour defects. Like other food products, extra virgin olive oil doesn't stay fresh forever—the beneficial nutrients and fresh flavours will decrease and change as the oil ages.

There are international and local voluntary industry standards that provide guidance for producers and consumers as to what chemical and flavour properties extra virgin olive oil should have. The Australian Consumer Law prohibits labelling olive oil as 'extra virgin' if it is not of this quality.

### Virgin olive oil

This olive oil is lower quality than extra virgin olive oil. It is more acidic and may have some flavour defects. Virgin olive oil is not very often sold in supermarkets mainly because consumers tend to demand the higher quality extra virgin olive oil.

## Refined olive oils

Pressed olive oils that don't fall within the quality grade of either 'extra virgin' or 'virgin' can be refined using chemical processes to remove impurities. The end result of this refining process is an oil that is lighter in colour, flavour and acidity than a pressed (or virgin) olive oil. This oil can be blended with small amounts of extra virgin or virgin olive oil to return

some of the flavour and characteristics that you'd expect in a pressed olive oil. The proportion of extra virgin or virgin oil that may be blended with the refined oil varies. Refined oils are free of defects, but typically don't have the same nutritional value as pressed olive oils. Refined olive oils also have a higher cooking temperature, or 'smoke point', than pressed olive oils and are generally better suited to cooking or deep frying.

There are a number of terms associated with refined olive oils that can be a bit confusing, including terms such as 'olive oil', 'light', 'extra light' or 'pure'. These oils are not extra virgin olive oil.

### 'Olive oil'

This product typically consists of refined olive oils blended with virgin olive oils.

### 'Light' or 'extra light' olive oil

Refined oils labelled 'light' or 'extra light' are milder in flavour and colour than extra virgin olive oil. 'Light' and 'extra light' olive oils do not have reduced kilojoules (or calories) or fat content as compared to other types of olive oil.

### 'Pure' olive oil

This product is typically a blend of refined and virgin olive oil. It consists of only olive oil rather than oil extracted from any other fruits or vegetables.

## Tips for getting the most out of your olive oil

Follow these guidelines to get the most out of your olive oil:

**Buy it fresh**—the fresher the oil, the better it tastes. Like any fresh product, the flavour and nutritional value will decline over time. Some extra virgin olive oil producers label their bottles with harvest dates or best before dates. It's important to look for these dates to ensure freshness.

Olives are a winter crop, so in Australia the harvest season is usually before the end of June, while in the Mediterranean the harvest can run from November to January. So, olive oils from Australia and the Mediterranean are fresher at different times of the year.

**Store it properly**—products sold in dark glass bottles or tins will help conserve the oil, but once opened it's important to store olive oil properly, particularly if you buy it in larger quantities.

- > **Keep it in the dark**—light will cause the quality of olive oil to deteriorate, so make sure you store your oil away from light in a cool, dark place like in a cupboard or pantry.
- > **Keep it cool**—heat also causes the quality of olive oil to deteriorate. It's best to store it in a cool, dark place located away from the stove. Avoid storing olive oil in the fridge because the low temperature can also affect the taste and the consistency.
- > **Keep it sealed**—once opened, make sure the container is sealed properly after use to minimize oxidation.

### Claims about olive oils

It's illegal for olive oil suppliers to mislead or deceive consumers or make misleading claims or representations. This includes claims about the standard, grade or quality of olive oil.

If you are looking for additional information about claims made by suppliers about olive oils, look for products with a recognised certification that their oil meets a standard such as the Australian Standard for Olive Oils and Olive Pomace Oils (AS5264-2011) and/or the International Olive Council's Trade Standard for Olive Oil.

### More information

For information on Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) and the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code which includes requirements for food labelling relevant to olive oil products, please visit the FSANZ website at [www.foodstandards.gov.au](http://www.foodstandards.gov.au)

For more information about consumer law relevant to olive oil products please visit the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) website at [www.accc.gov.au/forconsumers](http://www.accc.gov.au/forconsumers)

If you think you've seen a misleading or false olive oil claim, report it to the ACCC Infocentre on 1300 302 502 or contact your local consumer protection agency. These agencies are listed below. The ACCC and these agencies can also provide you with information about your rights as a consumer.



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For more information, contact your local consumer protection agency.

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#### New South Wales

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[fairtrading.nsw.gov.au](http://fairtrading.nsw.gov.au)

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[consumeraffairs.nt.gov.au](http://consumeraffairs.nt.gov.au)

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Office of Fair Trading T. 13 74 68  
[fairtrading.qld.gov.au](http://fairtrading.qld.gov.au)

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Consumer and Business Services T. 131 882  
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Consumer Protection T. 1300 30 40 54  
[commerce.wa.gov.au/consumerprotection](http://commerce.wa.gov.au/consumerprotection)

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission has national responsibilities for competition, fair trading and consumer protection and can be contacted on 1300 302 502 or visit [acc.gov.au](http://acc.gov.au)