

## So Many Oils, So Little Time - How To Choose the Right Oil For You.

Walk into any health food store and you will find a myriad of oils from which to choose. Peanut oil, walnut oil, olive oil, sunflower oil, oil for cooking, oil for salads, making the right choice is no piece of cake. You want to buy an oil that is both healthy and tasty, but you are overwhelmed by questions. How do I tell a good from a bad oil? Is one brand of oil better than another? Am I going to get what I pay for? How do I read the label? So many questions, so little time! Read further and you may discover the answers to these questions

As with any food purchase you should always be careful to read the label on a bottle of oil. The label can reveal a lot of information about the character and quality of an oil. For example, the label will tell you whether or not the oil is *first cold-pressed*. Any oil you buy should be first cold-pressed. First cold-pressing is a method of production in which oil is extracted or "squeezed" using a hydraulic or screw press. The actual pressing time of each oil will depend on the degree of resistance offered by the seed. Heat is a bi-product of the pressing process - temperatures may vary from 28°C to 60°C - but heat is directly added. This is an important consideration because the Essential Fatty Acids (EFAs) of the oil, necessary for good nutrition, can be destroyed by heat. This is one factor that gives first cold pressed oil a higher nutritive value than mass produced, heat refined oils. There are, of course, many other factors.

Once the first cold pressing process is complete, the oil is allowed to settle, filtered and then placed in dark glass bottles. Dark glass bottles are superior to clear plastic bottles because they help to prevent oxidation. Keep this in mind the next time you have to choose between an oil in a clear plastic bottle versus an oil in a dark glass bottle.

Truly first cold-pressed, unrefined vegetable oil is not a marketing tool. There are good reasons to buy cold-pressed oils, not the least of which is nutrition. A first cold-pressed oil will preserve the vitamins, minerals, lecithin, EFAs, trace elements of the seed from which it was made. EFAs, for example, are vital to good health and must be found in our daily diet since the body cannot produce them. As well, a good quality, first cold pressed oil can also provide you with a significant portion of your daily requirement of vitamin E, providing up to 30% more vitamin E than processed oils.

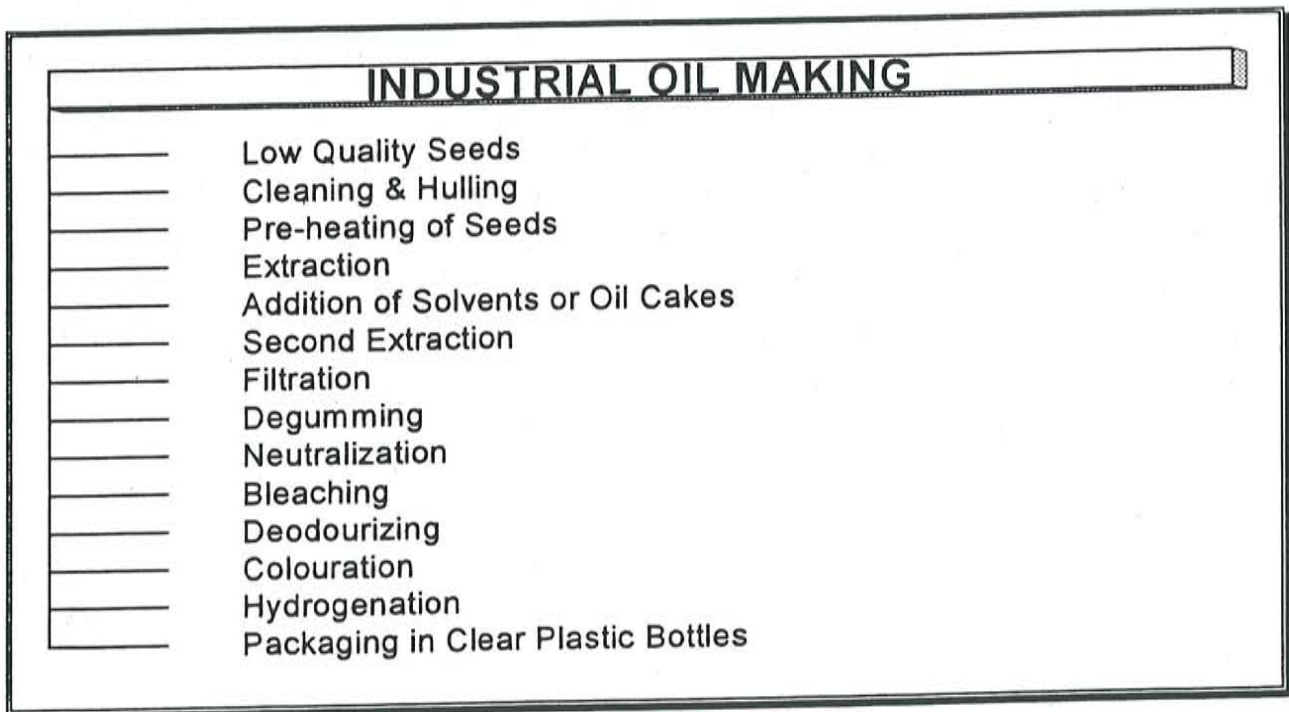
Unfortunately not all first cold-pressed oils are created equally. Because in Canada there are no laws to regulate the content of labels on bottles of oil, the term "first cold-pressed" has become repeatedly misused. Consumers today have no guarantee that oil they buy is truly a first cold-pressed oil. Many oils on the market today are cut (i.e. blends of refined and cold-pressed oils) or are produced from low-quality, pre-heated seeds and still profess to be true first cold-pressed oils. In addition, many of the producers of these oils will omit from the labels much of the information relevant to nutrition. Manufacturers are not required to state on the label when an oil has been degummed, refined, bleached or deodorized or even partially hydrogenated. Manufacturers are not required to state these things, and most often they do not. As a result you could be consuming an oil from which nutrients and essential fatty acids, elements important to good health, have been removed or altered and you would not even know it.

Exceptional first cold-pressed oils are generally more expensive and there are good reasons for this. For one, the quality of seeds used to produce a superior quality cold-pressed will contribute greatly to cost. Commercial production using chemical solvents allows the maximum degree of extraction, and thus a better yield and lower price, but they also yield a poorer quality oil. Keep in mind that immediate costs do not necessarily reflect long term costs. Because good quality first cold pressed oil is more expensive

immediately does not mean it is more expensive over the long run. There is more flavour and nutritive value in a good quality cold-pressed oil and therefore we are able to extract more pleasure and benefit using less oil. In the long run, the benefits far outweigh the costs.

So when shopping for oils, focus on good quality first cold pressed oils and stay away from refined oils. Why? Well, for one, oils are refined simply for reasons of economics; refining will yield more oil and have a longer shelf life. These factors have nothing to do with quality or nutrition. Processing at high temperatures will yield more oil but it also destroys many of the nutritive elements of the oil that we need for good health. Also, refining turns fragrant seed and nut oils into bland tasting colourless oils the taste of which cannot be distinguished. Thus, keep this rule of thumb in mind when purchasing an oil; the more refined the oil the poorer the quality, and the worse it is for your health.

There are two categories of oil refining processes; Industrial Oil Works and Semi-Industrial Oil Works. An Industrial Oil Works produce refined oils for mass consumption and low price, nutrition and quality are secondary considerations if they are considerations at all. Semi-Industrial Oil Works produce a better but still inferior quality of oil. These producers produce a low cost product using inferior quality seeds, they extract the oil at temperatures exceeding 80°C and sometimes make some cuts with refined oils. Despite their highly refined nature, these oils are often marketed as first cold-pressed oils. A review of the following diagram will further illustrate the difference between the first cold pressing process and the making of industrial oils.



## COLD-PRESSING PROCESS

High Quality Seeds

Cleaning & Hulling

Cold-Pressing

Settling

Filtration

Packaging in Dark Glass Bottles

Another important factor to consider when reading the label of a bottle of oil is the *expiration date*. Oils are very fragile and the longer they sit in a bottle the more time they have to lose their quality. In general, a good quality, first cold pressed oil will remain fresh in a bottle for a period of one year (4 months for flaxseed oil). Looking at the expiration date on a bottle of oil will tell you when the product was produced, and when you should get rid of it. Be skeptical of any oil that does not have an expiration date. First cold-pressed oil is a fresh product hence serious oil makers will print an expiration date, not so serious producers will not. If there is no expiration date you have no way of knowing whether or not this oil has been on the shelf for a couple of months or a couple of years. That knowledge will come later when you take the bottle home and experience the bitter taste and smell of an oil which is no longer fresh. Thus, I say again, be wary of an oil that does not have an expiration date.

The quality of the raw materials used to produce an oil is also a good indicator of quality of the oil itself. Seeds must be carefully selected according to the highest standards of taste, cleanliness, method of cultivation, degree of maturity at harvest and storage conditions.

Naturally, taste, colour and smell will tell you much about the quality of an oil. In regards to colour, each oil is different; some oils are darker than others. When considering the colour of a particular type of oil (e.g. olive oil), consider it in isolation from others. Darker is not necessarily better. But then again, you should also be wary of an oil that is too light in colour. An oil that is too translucent is usually refined, whereas one that is too dark reveals an oil that was produced in temperatures that were too high. So when selecting a good quality oil consider "balance"; not too dark and not too light is just right.

So what about taste? An authentic, cold-pressed, unrefined oil tastes like the fruit, nut or seed from which it was made. The reason for this is simple, nothing - like chemicals or heat - is added to the process so nothing should alter the taste. In comparison, refined oils are tasteless, odourless and usually pale in colour.

When purchasing an oil it is not only important to know the quality of the oil itself, it is also important to know the commitment of the oil producer. In an environment absent of regulations, many oil producers

have entered the market impersonating quality craftsmanship. These impostors have little commitment to quality. Therefore, as important as knowing the oil you buy is knowing who makes the oil you buy. La Maison Orphee is no impostor. La Maison Orphee has developed a strong reputation as a producer of high quality oils through years of experience. The company offers its customers a wide variety of oils manufactured according to traditional European cold-pressing methods. Despite the fact that the processes to produce oils have become more sophisticated, Orphee has maintained a commitment to quality and traditional craftsmanship. Orphee oils are produced at Orphee's Quebec City oil mill as well as the highly respected Vigean family mill in France - the Vigean family is reputed to be one of the best cold-pressed oil makers in France. The Orphee team insures the quality of its oils from production to bottling. Since their founding, La Maison Orphee promotes food quality through education and information. Top quality oils are, for Orphee, a matter of pride. Try a bottle of Orphee oil and experience this pride for yourself.

Now that the mystery of oils has been de-mystified venture out and buy yourself a good quality cold-pressed oil. Try the oil by itself, with some bread, in a salad or in a recipe like the one provided below. Let me tell you, it will be a true delight.

### Supreme Goat Cheese Toasts on Greens

1	goat cheese log, cut in thick slices
6	slices sourdough rye bread
	mixed greens (Romaine, curly, Boston)
1	apple, finely sliced
	a few green grapes
	a few slices of onion
50 g.	toasted hazelnuts
1/2 cup	<b>Orphee Olive Oil</b>
2 Tsp.	fresh thyme
1	garlic clove, minced
	fresh ground pepper

#### Vinaigrette:

2 Tsp.	old wine vinegar
1/2 cup	<b>Orphee Nutcracker oil (blend)</b>
	Put all ingredients in a screw top jar and shake well

First, mix all ingredients from the third group and leave to stand in the freezer for half an hour until the mixture thickens into a butter.

Preheat the oven at 375°F. Slice the bread in as many pieces as you have of goat cheese. Butter the bread with thyme and olive oil mixture and place on a sheet in the oven for 5 minutes or until the bottom of the bread is slightly toasted. remove the toast from the oven and garnish with the goat cheese slices. Put all the ingredient from the second group, not including the hazelnuts, in a salad bowl. Add the toasts. Then drizzle with hazelnuts. Finally, pour the vinaigrette over the salad and enjoy!

Do not bake goat cheese.

Makes 4 servings.

*Pascale Parent*