



THE *Pornanino* OLIVE OIL NEWSLETTER

No. 1, June 2006

Hello everybody and welcome to the very first issue of our brand new *Pornanino Olive Oil Newsletter*! The network of our friends worldwide is growing so fast we just can't keep in touch with them all, so we thought this might be the ideal way to let you all know what's going on in our little Tuscan paradise. Plus, we'll tell you lots more about olive oil, how it is made and where – we're so proud of our beautiful Chianti region we really want to share its wonders with you. So get ready for loads of insider info, tips, gossip and news! We hope you'll enjoy reading our newsletter as much as we did writing it for you. Hopefully it'll come out on a quarterly basis, and if there's any subject you'd like us to cover please let us know. We'd love to get your comments. You can write to us at newsletter@chiantionline.com.

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Pornanino
Extra Virgin
Olive Oil

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simply,
the best.

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here ...



Franco's olive grove diary



Olive oil making is a year-round affair. As spring sets in Franco is busy tending to his groves. Here's

the diary of a typical day on the Pornanino estate, so you can check how your 2006 olive oil is getting on. [Read more](#)

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Franco's olive grove diary

Olive oil making is a year-round affair. As spring sets in Franco is busy tending to his groves. Here's the diary of a typical day on the Pornanino estate, so you can check how your 2006 olive oil is getting on.



It's been a miserable winter in Italy, relentlessly cold, wet and going on through March. Olive trees don't mind the cold too much, though, provided a late frost doesn't hit the flowers - which mercifully didn't happen this year. So far, so good, but it's still early to celebrate. It takes about six months for the drupes to develop and ripen and anything may still happen. But we take good care, so you don't have to worry about your next supply of Pornanino olive oil.

In winter the trees hibernate so nothing much goes on, but as soon as spring comes in the pace picks up. Franco is an early riser. He's usually up and about at dawn, patrolling his hillside groves with his tractor. He doesn't have to commute far - the trees come down the gentle slopes to his doorstep. He can actually see most of them from his windows!

On the Pornanino estate there are about 4,000 olive trees. When Franco bought it, some 15 years ago, the farm had been neglected for a very long time, so most of the olive trees are quite young - he actually planted them himself. Olive trees must be at least 12 years old before they start seriously bearing fruit, but then their productive life can go on for decades. There are actually quite a number of specimens around the Mediterranean who are several centuries old.

Olive trees are quite hardy, but if there's one thing they hate it's getting their feet wet. That's why they thrive in hilly, rocky soil where water drains away quickly and there is little rainfall in summer. So what Franco does in spring is lightly prune them so that they don't grow too tall, otherwise hand harvesting would be even more time-consuming than it already is. Then he routinely makes sure that the soil around them is free of weeds and loose, to prevent stagnating water from making the trees uncomfortable. We want them to be healthy and happy to bear perfect fruit!

One chore Franco doesn't have to see to is spraying his groves to kill the pest known as "white fly", an all-too-common bug that's notoriously fond of olive trees and haunts most groves in Tuscany as elsewhere. There is no white fly on the Pornanino estate thanks to its hillside location about 400 meters above sea level and well sheltered from the humid sea breezes that blow in from the nearby coast. Franco can happily do without pesticides or any other chemicals.

Around noon, when the sun gets a little too hot for comfort even in spring, Franco gets off his red tractor and makes a bee-line for home. Every self-respecting Italian likes to have a leisurely lunch sitting down with his or her legs under the table, as we say. For many families lunch is the main meal of the day, with a minimum of two courses and fruit to follow - and pasta is a definite must. Then it would be madness to get back to work on a full stomach in the hottest part of the day, so it makes perfect sense to take a nice nap. Can you wonder that we have dozens of regional words for siesta?

Later, the chug-chugging of the red tractor's engine is again to be heard for a few hours, far away among the olive trees. But when the sun sets behind the hills the only sound to break the peace is the chirping of birds and the gentle rustling of leaves caressed by the evening breeze. Your olive trees are safe in Franco's hands this spring.

How much do you know about olive oil? Take our test and find out

We know you appreciate fine olive oil. But are you sure you really know the basics? Well, let's see how you handle our quiz.

It's best to use as little as possible because olive oil makes you fat



Wrong. While it's true that olive oil is a source of calories, just like any other fat, our body can't function correctly on an entirely fat-free diet. So cutting out fats altogether is not a good idea. Compared to other cooking fats, however, olive oil is good for us in many other ways. Modern research has confirmed that it protects our heart by getting rid of "bad"

cholesterol, helps digestion, contains several unique vitamins and acts as a powerful antioxidant, which means it promotes cell regeneration and might even ward off cancer. In short, it keeps our body healthy, fit and rejuvenated. Actually, it has been suggested that the very best way of looking after oneself is slurping a tablespoon of straight extra virgin olive oil first thing in the morning, every day. Just don't make it three or four, though, or you'll get fat!

I always buy first cold pressed extra virgin olive oil

True. Good for you! If you want all the flavour plus the virtues we mentioned above, there's no other way to go. And please don't think we are biased if we point out that the advantages far outbalance the cost. A superior first cold pressed extra virgin olive oil is hard to get and worth every dollar it costs, just like a good bottle of wine. The problem here is that you won't be able to tell a quality product from an inferior one just by reading the label or the price tag. Terms like "first cold pressed" and "extra virgin" actually are no guarantee that the olive oil you're buying is free from chemicals and industrial processing, let alone telling you anything about the quality of the olives it is made from. A good rule of thumb when choosing, therefore, is to avoid brands that are sold in mass-retail outlets, as no company who produces hundreds of thousands of bottles can afford to do so the traditional way – even if they claim to. If you want quality you have to look at the smaller outfits. Shop around, taste and judge for yourself. But be wary – there are sharks out

there, and that's one thing that doesn't mix well with olive oil.

I use my favourite olive oil sparingly, so it will last longer

Wrong. Apart from the fact that olive oil is good for you so you should use it every day, it is a natural product and as such it does have a shelf life. It is best consumed within 1 year of the production date, but it can keep for up to 2 years if it comes from slightly unripe olives – the way we make it. Just be sure to store your olive oil in a dark cupboard, and remember it doesn't like it when it's too cold. Don't let it freeze and don't expose it to sunlight (that's why good olive oil comes in dark-colored glass bottles). Keep it corked when you're not using it.

Most people only use extra virgin olive oil on a salad. I don't agree

True. Full marks. If the olive oil you're using is good, it will have a very distinct personality that can enhance the flavor of any food it meets. It's actually a shame to only use it for salads! Italian cooking can be very elaborate and sophisticated, but it's often at its best when working with only a few very fresh ingredients, subtly underscored by a drizzle of good olive oil. Just think of the simple perfection of dishes such as bruschetta (grilled bread, fresh tomato, garlic, basil and olive oil) or caprese (sliced mozzarella cheese, fresh tomato, oregano or basil leaves and olive oil); true Italian-style pizza couldn't do without, nor such essential masterpieces as spaghetti tossed with garlic, a little chilli pepper and olive oil. Why, olive oil is the secret of Italian cuisine! To enjoy it, though, you must first get rid of the clutter to allow it space to breathe. Next time you have a steak try drizzling a little olive oil on it instead of dousing it with ketchup. Cook the simplest vegetable soup and finish it up with just a little olive oil poured on before serving – you won't need any other fat or shortening, and it will still taste great. With an olive oil bottle at hand you could even go on a diet with a smile. And if weight is not an issue (lucky you), then you might be interested to know that olive oil is actually your healthiest bet as a frying fat. So you're absolutely right. Extra virgin olive oil is positively wasted if you only use it on a salad.

What's on in Chianti this summer

Are you coming to Chianti in the summer? Then this list of not-to-be-missed events is for you. And if you have made other arrangements, perhaps it's not too late to reconsider ...

Just a short driving distance from both Florence and Siena, the Chianti area is quite small, but despite its diminutive size it encompasses an amazing concentration of medieval hamlets, landmark little towns and some of the most scenic, pristine countryside Italy has to offer. Traditionally, summer is the time of the year when rural communities spill outside to have fun under the stars. Almost every village, no matter how small, stages its own open-air fair to celebrate its patron Saint's day or some centuries-old historical event. It doesn't take much of an excuse to celebrate! The following list of events is by no means comprehensive – there will be much more going on. If you want to know exactly how much you'll have to come and find out for yourself... Look out for the week of August 15 (we call it Ferragosto, the day marking the Virgin Mary's ascension to heaven) when nobody in their right mind would stay home!

Wandering musicians festival – Music and food stalls

May 27-28, Greve in Chianti –

Festival della Ginestra (Broom Fair) - Music and food stalls

June 17-18, La Panca (Strada in Chianti)

Stars and Merchants – night handicrafts market with music and shows

Every 3rd Thursday night from May through August, Greve in Chianti

Palio di Siena – world-famous horse race around Siena's main square run twice every year. Expect large crowds

July 2, Siena

Festa di Sant'Anna (Saint Anne's fair) – music and dancing

July 24 through 26, Greve in Chianti

Goblets of stars – music, specialty food stalls and Chianti wine tasting

August 10, Greve in Chianti and Tavernelle Val di Pesa

Festa di San Cassiano (Saint Cassiano Fair) – band music, food stalls, dancing and fireworks

August 13, San Casciano

Festa del Nocciolo (Hazelnut Fair) – open-air dinner with local dishes

August 14, Panzano in Chianti

Palio di Siena – second yearly appointment with the world-famous horse race around Siena's main square. Expect large crowds.

August 16, Siena

Festa Passato e Presente – ancient fair celebrating the historic battle of Monteperti, with music, food and wine stalls and a torch-lit parade

3rd and last weekend of August, Casetta/Monteperti

Festa del Luca (Luca Fair) – food and wine stalls and open-air dinner in the main square

1st and 2nd weekend of September, San Giusmè

Festa della Rificolona – handicraft market, rificolona parade and contest, music and shows

September 7, Greve in Chianti

Stradainfiera (Strada Fair) – music, shows, handicraft market, jostling and food stalls

September 17-18, Strada in Chianti

Festa dell'Uva (Grapes Fair) – a step back in time to celebrate Chianti's rural past with villagers in traditional costume, artisans and the old times re-enacted in the streets; floats parade, music, food stalls and Chianti wine tasting.

Last week of September, Vagliagli



The PORNANINO Olive Oil 2006 US Tour

We went to America in April to show off our wonderful olive oil, and were rewarded by the warmest welcome we could hope for. It was so much fun we want to tell you all about it.

Touring the US has become a pleasant tradition for Franco and his daughter Francesca. They have been flying over every year to meet with old friends and make new ones across the States. This time they were accompanied by yet another Francesca, the first Francesca's sister in law. A bit confusing, isn't it? But that's the Italian extended family for you!



So off we flew on a warm spring morning, headed for Washington, DC. And you know what? We arrived just in time to see the celebrated cherry blossoms in full bloom,

such a gorgeous sight on a picture-perfect sunny afternoon! It was a terrific welcome, but nothing compared to the reception we got at Sally Beach's family home for our first olive oil seminar. Those are the real highlights of our US tours. Franco just loves talking about his favourite subject and sharing the knowledge he has gathered over the years as an enthusiastic olive oil producer. Sally had invited more than 40 friends to attend, with a lavish Italian buffet to follow Franco's presentation. It's been a wonderful evening!

Next morning (April Fool's, and no mistake) we reported at Regan airport, mercifully hours early even though our taxi driver had treated us to a most thorough and unrequested sight-seeing tour of downtown DC, only to discover that our Chicago flight was actually leaving from Dulles. We made it, but only because traffic is slack on a Saturday ...

Up in the North-West spring had yet to arrive but nobody seemed to mind. Natives in T-shirts and sandals threw us pitying looks as we huddled in our coats, shivering and wishing we had packed

woollen scarves. Tourists – can't stand a breeze. Look, it was a windy 40° F and *freezing!*

From Chicago we took the Greyhound bus (wow!) to Madison, WI, where our second seminar was scheduled. The venue was the long-standing Lombardino's Restaurant, THE place to eat Italian food in town. If you are from around there you're sure to know it (www.lombardinos.com). Chef Patrick, an old friend of ours, had cooked a 7-course Italian feast as a backdrop for Franco's olive oil lecture. And the audience, about 70 strong, seemed to appreciate both ...

On to Milwaukee, WI, we had the honor of staying at the historic Milwaukee Athletic Club, where Franco gave his olive oil seminar to some 80 members. Despite the grand surroundings it was a very friendly, relaxed evening. And it was also very nice to have lunch at the Italian Community Center – a real corner of Italy on the shores of Lake Michigan!

Emboldened by our ten days on the road, we arrived in Winnetka, IL, by a combination of train and metro. Our host Betsy, who was picking us up at the station, had never seen us but she recognized us on the spot: three forlorn, shivering figures surrounded by a mountain of luggage. Franco and the two Francescas were instantly adopted by the cheerful staff of Corner Cooks, where our last seminar was due to be held. If you live in the Chicago area and don't know the place, have a look at their website (www.cornercooks.com). It's the most wonderful cooking school/catering/take away you can imagine. Needless to say, Franco's presentation was a success and so much fun!

Then it was time to head back home, a few pounds heavier (so much good food!) but happy. We met so many great people. Thank you everyone, we hope to see you again. Come and see us in Tuscany next time!

Stay tuned for the 2007 tour dates and locations!

Grandma Lia's olive oil recipes

Quick and easy recipes straight from the Italian regional tradition, courtesy of Lia's family cookbook. Think of us when you serve them to your family and friends!

Pesto sauce (serves 4)

2 cups fresh basil leaves

¼ cup pine nuts

½ cup Parmesan cheese, grated

2 garlic cloves, peeled

Pornanino extra virgin olive oil

Put the fresh basil leaves, rinsed and pat-dried, in the blender together with the grated Parmesan cheese, pine nuts and garlic cloves. Add plenty of Pornanino extra virgin olive oil and process until creamy and smooth. If the sauce is too thick loosen it with a little more olive oil. Use to season pasta (spaghetti is best). It's also great to give a fresh Italian flavour to just about any dish. You can keep a jar of pesto in the fridge for a few days. It will lose its bright green color, but the flavor will actually improve. Make sure to top it with olive oil to prevent it from drying out.

Summery chicken salad (serves 2)

2 chicken breasts, boneless and skinless

carrot, onion and celery, a few bits of each (optional)

1 bay leaf (optional)

2 large ripe tomatoes

1 cup mixed fresh herbs (thyme, marjoram, oregano, mint, basil, chives)

Pornanino extra virgin olive oil

Balsamic vinegar (optional)

Baby spinach leaves to garnish

Bring water to the boil in a saucepan with a few bits of carrot, onion and celery and a bay leaf (optional). Add the chicken breasts and cook until tender (about 15 minutes, depending on size). When cooked through drain, let cool and slice. Chop the herbs, mix with about ½ cup of Pornanino extra virgin olive oil and pour over the chicken, seasoning with salt and freshly-ground pepper. Cover with cling film and let stand in the fridge for at least one hour. Meanwhile wash the tomatoes, cut them in half and remove the seeds. Dice them and leave to drain in a colander. When ready to serve, put the baby spinach in a large platter, arrange the sliced chicken over it together with most of the herb marinade. Top with the diced tomatoes, seasoned with the remaining marinade, a little salt and a few drops of balsamic vinegar if liked.

