



THE *Pornanino* OLIVE OIL NEWSLETTER

No. 12, April 2009

Happy spring, dear olive oil friends! Isn't it nice to turn the page on a bleak winter to venture into a bright new season? True, that won't change the way things are, but at least there will be sunshine and warmth. Perhaps in the heady boom days we had forgotten how to savor the small pleasures in life – well, those at least are free and plentiful for all of us to enjoy! And talking of the good things in life, we'd like to thank those of you who have taken the time to complete the quality appraisal feedback form (if you haven't received one and would like to contribute, here's the link to it). Hey, WE'VE PASSED THE TEST WITH FLYING COLORS! Thank you everybody. We are so proud of the lovely things you wrote that we've posted them on our website. Just click here and see how amazingly wonderful our Pornanino friends are!

Pure.

Natural.

Pornanino
Extra Virgin
Olive Oil

Quite
simply,
the best.

Get it
here ...



Franco's olive grove diary

The big news these days is that there's nothing big to report. We've had an average winter in our part of the world, just as it used to be – grey, cold and slightly more rainy than most, but altogether in the norm. Should we be disappointed? [Read more](#)

1000 shades of gold



How do we love thee? Let us count the ways. There's smooth of course, and full-bodied; there's crisp, peppery and even tart. Some love it fruity, some love it strong; others prefer it gentle and light. One thousand shades of flavor, and we love them all. [Read more](#)

Breaking News

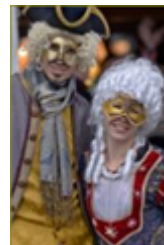
Here comes an exciting wave of new initiatives, just as we'd promised a few months ago. We're starting small, in baby steps, but you can bet we're going to grow up fast.

Just for starters, here's a sneak preview of what we've been cooking up: a scrumptious recipe book choke-full of olive oil goodies. Fast, healthy and simply delicious. Enjoy!



[Read more](#)

The rites of spring (to come)



As rumor would have it, Italians are party animals *par excellence*. Every excuse is good to celebrate and spring, or rather the run-up to it, is the perfect occasion to prove the rumor right. [Read more](#)

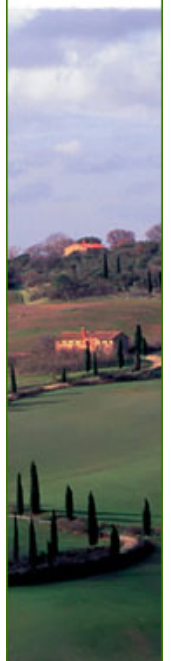
Grandma Lia's olive oil recipes

Spring is the time when nature's taps are turned on again, or so it was in our farming grandparents' time. This is why traditional Easter fare is a triumph of fresh produce such as vegetables, dairy products and eggs. And artichokes are king. [Read more](#)

Let us
help you
arrange
your next
Italian holiday

FINE ITALIAN
RENTALS

Your home
away from
home



We'd love to hear from you! Here's our email address oliveoil@chiantionline.com

Editor and copy: Francesca Boggio Robutti

© 2009 Az. Agricola Pornanino. All rights reserved. Reproduction without permission prohibited. While we make every effort to provide accurate and reliable information, we cannot be held responsible for any mistakes that may occur.

Franco's olive grove diary

The big news these days is that there's nothing big to report. We've had an average winter in our part of the world, just as it used to be – grey, cold and slightly more rainy than most, but altogether in the norm. Should we be disappointed?

Of course not. It's a very good thing, but we have been fed so many disasters over the past few years, climatic and otherwise, that getting a dose of normality seems somehow odd. Well, let's enjoy that while it lasts!

Spring so far has been true to form as well. If the trend keeps up, it would be something like the fourth regular season in a row, and we'd have to thank Mother Nature for going back to her sober, conservative self which is what her leafy children love best.

As we hope you appreciated, our olive groves really enjoyed last year's well-disciplined weather, with its near-perfect balance of rain and sunshine. Their strength is reflected in the full-bodied thickness of the 2008 oil. If it were wine, would it be defined as "muscular"? It might as well.

When nature is in charge and driving responsibly, our olive trees would thrive even if we left them to their own devices and went on holiday until September (not a bad idea, actually).

Olive trees don't need much care-taking, because they are hardy creatures well adjusted to the Mediterranean climate. All it takes to make them happy is hot, dry summers, moderately cold winters and an adequate amount of rain in spring and autumn. Just don't take them by surprise, because they hate it when a sudden cold spell hits them in flower, not to mention being drowned in rain when they are in the delicate process of developing their fruit. And they can't stand nature's temper tantrums, especially thunderstorms and hailstorms, the kind of theatrics that can undo in minutes a full growing season's work.

But olive trees can overcome most challenges; when drought strikes they may stop producing

olives to concentrate on survival. The only mortal threat to an olive tree is severe cold, which unfortunately is not an unheard of catastrophe in the Chianti area. It has happened in the not so distant past, and entire olive groves were wiped out.

This doesn't mean that there's nothing going on in Franco's beloved olive groves. Far from it. Spring is the time when the olive trees are pruned, and ideally this is of paramount importance for several reasons. First of all light and air need to circulate among the branches to keep both the tree and the prospective crop healthy. Second, too many branches would sap the tree's energy, reducing its yield. Last but not least, olive trees are shaped by pruning to make them easier to harvest, and this is a veritable priority in the big commercial estates.

We confess that we have barely scratched the surface of the ancient art of pruning, partly because we don't really need to bend our trees' nature to our will – we are neither striving for record crops nor use harvesting machines. Also, it's sad to say, it has become increasingly difficult to find somebody to learn the old ways from, since the last generation of *contadini* (farmers) is dying out. Their offspring moved to the city decades ago and never came back, except to sign the sale of the ancestral land to reformed town-dwellers - like Franco and Matteo.

More about this in the next issue. Meanwhile we'll keep practicing – trying to learn from last year's mistakes, as we struggle to untangle overeager masses of twigs that shouldn't be there in the first place, unless we got some passage wrong. Sometimes we have the uncomfortable impression that our trees are silently laughing at us ...



**Don't stop buying Italian,
it will help us to keep buying American!**

1000 shades of gold

How do we love thee? Let us count the ways. There's smooth of course, and full-bodied; there's crisp, peppery and even tart. Some love it fruity, some love it strong; others prefer it gentle and light. One thousand shades of flavor, and we love them all.



As we said many times before, there are no objective laboratory tests to determine whether an olive oil is “good” or “bad”, because the variables are simply too many and too complex. Translated in plain language, that means that the huge range of chemicals contained in the humble

fruit of the olive tree is simply too vast and variegated to categorize, which is why the Italian and European official protocols for extra virgin olive oils include the testing by a panel of expert tasters.

You can do your own sensory analysis (as it's called) yourself. Pour a little olive oil into a clear wineglass, making sure that it's at a temperature of 28° C (82.4° F). Look at it first: it should range from deep green to delicate golden, depending on its origin; beware of too pale or orange-tinged ones, although of course color can be chemically adjusted. Most experts skip this phase anyway as it's deemed to be misleading, and ultimately meaningless.

Olive oil is (or should be) a living, breathing natural product just like wine. Sniff it, shortly and repeatedly. It's a devil at picking up smells and flavors, so if you catch a whiff of rancid, mold or metal you'll know it's no good; yet, no smell would be just as bad (tampered with). What you should look for is a healthy, fresh fruit bouquet, sometimes accompanied by notes of green apple, almond, green tomato, flowers or cut grass – or so the experts say!

Now for the final test – the tasting. We'll spare you the details of the official ritual; suffice it to say it would probably make you feel a little silly, unless you are a professional and used to slurping, gurgling and smacking your tongue for quite a while before spitting out. Taste it with a bit of bread instead (the solons will excuse you). What do you think of it? Hah, caught you. You can't say just anything, you know. There's quite a long list of official definitions to try and describe the

countless shades of flavor that shimmer in a drop of nature's green gold.

Just imagine. Any olive oil is characterized by the type of olives that went into it, often more than one, combined with what the French call *terroir*, or the place of cultivation, combined with the growing season's weather, the degree of ripeness, the harvesting method, how long and where the harvested olives were stored, the pressing method, how the olive oil was stored. Change just one of the variables and the flavor of the olive oil will be changed, for good or for bad.

There are all of 17 official definitions for “bad”, ranging from the more predictable rancid, moldy or muddy to such things as wormy (olives tainted by the white fly), netty (olives left too long on the ground on plastic nets) vinegary, frosty, or cucumber-tasting. In short any sin, however venial, will leave a mark on the olive oil.

Anything will leave a mark on olive oil, which is actually one of its most fascinating characteristics. And it keeps shifting, revealing new facets as time mellows the friskiness of youth. Take our 2008 olive oil. Last year we had a superb season, and that is reflected in the oil: it's dense, rich and full-bodied, with a persistent flavor. We had a massive harvest, which meant working on the double-quick. The oil was bottled virtually within days of picking, and that shows as well (lots of peppery greenness and harmless sediments, for instance).

If you tasted it fresh, in December, you might have found it almost overpowering in its fruitiness, and with a marked degree of the bitterness that characterizes the flavonoid-rich, slightly unripe olives we favor (more antioxidants for you!). Within a month it would have changed, as flavors unfold and mingle. Given a little more time it would have softened and settled to reveal a different picture altogether. Just like vintage wine, it will keep improving in subtle ways as it matures and develops.

And next year's oil will be an altogether different story. Don't you just love the way nature keeps surprising us with her thousand shades of gold?

Breaking News

Here comes an exciting wave of new initiatives, just as we'd promised a few months ago. We're starting small, in baby steps, but you can bet we're going to grow up fast. Enjoy!

Could we have been hit by that infectious spring magic that energizes us to tidy up the garage and fix the backyard fence all in the same week-end (after putting off both for months)? Perhaps it's the accumulated boredom of the last couple of months that's boiling over and calling us to action. Winter is over, it's time to rise and shine! Whatever bug bit us, we're full of enthusiasm and ready to go.



This is really hot: the **Pornanino Extra Virgin Olive Oil Cookbook** is out! It's on Blurb. You can preview it online, order it and have it delivered to your home in no time at all. You'll find the recipes we have published here on the Newsletter, plus lots more. All have been selected, tested, photographed (and enjoyed) by your editor. Grab it at www.blurb.com/books/601437 or click the image next and get cooking!

And if you like it spread the word ...

And of course we are buoyed by the fantastic response to our **customer satisfaction survey**. We wanted to make sure that those of you who had bought our extra virgin olive oil had been satisfied and guess what – we seem to have a whole lot of happy customers. Bar two. Only two of you out of several hundred, can you imagine? This sure made for a wonderful start to the year. Thank you and please help us to remain on top of things. If you have any suggestions or criticisms please let us know! Compliments are welcome too ... You can find the quality assessment form (and some very flattering comments) on our website at <http://www.oliveoil.chiantionline.com/feedback.htm>

This brings us to the third piece of news. **We're on Facebook** folks! And we've opened a group for the Pornanino olive oil-loving friends, so we can chat and exchange ideas and news. Help us to grow the Pornanino olive oil community, join us at www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=50639519527 or click the blue button next. It's easy, free and so much fun!



Also, be advised that we are busily planning our **Pornanino Olive Oil 2009 US tour**. We are still ironing out the details and will keep you posted about it. It's scheduled for September, so there's still ample time to plan. If you wish us to come and talk about the wonders of olive oil at your club/community centre/school/circle of friends/cooking school/favorite restaurant/whatever just let us know. If we can fit it in our schedule we'll be pleased and honored to come. Just send us a mail.



**Don't stop buying Italian,
it will help us to keep buying American!**

The rites of spring (to come)

As rumor would have it, Italians are party animals *par excellence*. Every excuse is good to celebrate and spring, or rather the run-up to it, is the perfect occasion to prove the rumor right.



It always seems like a miracle when nature is reborn in spring, fresh and new year after year. To most of us today it brings the joy of longer, warmer days. For millennia it must have seemed like the cavalry coming to the rescue, and not a minute too soon; winters were long and hard, and notorious for sometimes

pushing farmers to the brink of starvation. What if one year spring didn't show up? A nice mess that would have been.

In time carnival came to be assimilated in the Christian tradition, but its roots run much deeper. How far back in the past do they reach it's impossible to say – spring-related ceremonies have been known to exist the world over. Recorded instances of carnival-like festivals take us to ancient Egypt, where 4000 years ago they were celebrated in honor of the goddess Isis, who presided over fertility and the cycle of life. The Greeks had their own version under the aegis of Dionysus, and it was a pretty rowdy act. The Romans followed suit with their Saturnalia.

Although the feasts celebrating the god Saturn were held in December (around Christmas, and it's not a coincidence), in nature they were really close to the spirit of carnival. It was a time of liberation and merry-making when the barriers between the classes were removed – masters and servants were equals for a few days, and even the slaves could party like everybody else. Life ground to a halt as social order was subverted for a few days. It was an institutionalized way of letting off steam before going back to the humdrum of everyday routine.

The name "carnival" comes from the Latin *carne(m) levare*, meaning "removing meat". Of Christian origin, it refers to the sober 40-day period of repentance that leads to the solemn festivities of Easter. During Lent the faithful were barred from eating meat, and encouraged to fast and meditate, but BEFORE that anything went!

It was a unique opportunity to set free the anarchic, non-conformist streak that hallmarks each and every Italian, past or present. And as in Roman times, the authorities were only too happy to grant a few days' leave to be wild in exchange for eleven plus months of obedience. People went around masked and in disguise in order to be free to speak their mind about the higher-ups, and act as crazy as they pleased.

Carnival has been celebrated all over Italy since the Middle Ages, and in hundreds of towns and villages the tradition has been kept up to the present day, with dancing in the streets, contests, theme parties and parades. None of them is as lavish or celebrated as the world-famous carnival of Venice.

Venetians admittedly had lots of time to practice – the first mention of a carnival dates back to 1094 and must have been pretty successful since over the next two centuries it had grown to last from Boxing Day to Ash Wednesday. The good people of Venice knew how to have fun; rich, cultivated and powerful as they were thanks to their trading, they could afford to drop business for a time and just party. Mask-makers had such a brisk trade that they had formed a guild by the mid-15th century.

Renaissance-time Florence was another hotspot for carnival revelries, but in the end all the partying served to encourage the arts. Music and poetry flourished, as well as the *Commedia dell'Arte* which would form the basis for modern theatre.

When Venice was conquered by Napoleon and then by the Austrians, in 1797, the carnival was suppressed for fear of riots and rebellions. The tradition subsequently declined all over Italy as the political situation deteriorated, but survival is part of Italians' DNA together with that anarchic streak. As soon as conditions improved carnival sprang back like a jack in the box, to the delight of everyone. Venice included.

Grandma Lia's olive oil recipes

Spring is the time when nature's taps are turned on again, or so it was in our farming grandparents' time. This is why traditional Easter fare is a triumph of fresh produce such as vegetables, dairy products and eggs. Artichokes are king.

Torta Pasqualina/Easter artichoke pie (makes a 9 in round tin)

9 oz puff pastry

5 artichokes, of the spiky kind

½ lb ricotta cheese (or cottage cheese)

3 tablespoons grated Parmesan cheese

3 tablespoons PORNANINO Extra Virgin Olive Oil
a bunch of fresh marjoram

4 small eggs

salt and freshly ground pepper



According to Liguria's tradition you should make the pastry yourself by working together flour, water and a little olive oil. Rolled out very thin, it should be cut out in rounds the size of the baking tin and layered, with a little olive oil brushed in between the sheets (tradition would require 33 in all, or Jesus Christ's age). Using puff pastry is quicker. Top off the artichokes and remove the tough outer leaves, slice and cook over a low to medium heat, with 3 tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil and as much water as needed. Season with salt and pepper and set aside to cool. Line a baking tin with puff pastry. In a bowl combine the artichokes, roughly chopped, with the ricotta and Parmesan cheese, some marjoram, salt and pepper. Transfer to the baking tin, level well and make four hollows

with the back of a spoon. Fill each hollow with a raw egg, shell removed. Cover with the rest of the pastry, brush with a little olive oil and bake in a fairly hot oven (400° F) for about 45 minutes, or until deep golden. Let rest for a few hours before serving. Serve at room temperature or just warm. The chemicals in the artichokes will cause the egg whites to turn green – that's normal and perfectly harmless.

Roast lamb with artichokes (serves 4)

2 lb kid or lamb

1 bay leaf and 1 sprig of rosemary

½ cup dry white wine

¼ cup of stock (or water and ¼ stock cube)

8 artichokes, of the spiky kind

1 lemon

6 tablespoons PORNANINO Extra Virgin Olive Oil
freshly ground pepper



Heat 4 tablespoons of the extra virgin olive oil in a heavy saucepan and brown the lamb, cut into even-sized chunks, together with a bay leaf and the rosemary. When it's nicely browned season with salt and freshly ground pepper, and douse with the dry white wine. Let it evaporate over a high heat, then turn down the heat, pour on the stock (or water and stock cube) and cook gently with a lid on until the meat is cooked through – about 45 minutes. Remove the stalks, spiky top and outer leaves of the artichokes. Cut each in half lengthwise, dip in water acidulated with the juice of one lemon to prevent the artichokes from turning black and blanch by immersing for 2 to 3 minutes in a pan of boiling water. Drain, slice each half in rather thick slices and sauté them with the rest of the oil over medium heat. Season

with salt. When the lamb is done add the sauté artichokes to the casserole and cook over a low heat for a further 10 minutes. Let rest awhile before serving, to enable the flavours to mix. If necessary reheat (it will actually improve).

Tell us if you like our recipes! Is there a recipe you'd like Grandma Lia to work out for you? [Let us know](#)