



THE *Pornanino* OLIVE OIL NEWSLETTER

No. 14, October 2009

Get ready, set ... GO! It's that time of the year again, the mellow season of crisp, golden days and soft, muted mists. You know, the one that makes us cringe in anticipation of the ordeal to come, that love/hate handful of frenzied weeks when nature's gifts are magically transformed into olive oil. Magically but not effortlessly, alas! It's going to be the usual madhouse around here in a few weeks' time, but frankly who cares? Nature magic is bound to be a little messy. So what does it all mean for you, dear fellow olive oil lovers? **IT'S ORDERING TIME, ladies and gentlemen! Please don't forget to place your orders now and the new oil will be shipped to you by the beginning of December**, as usual, nice and fresh and pretty much bursting out of the bottle with all the eagerness of youth. This year's harvest won't be as massive as last year's, so we're back to "first come first serve". **Don't risk missing out. Please order now! [Click here for the order form.](#)**

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Olive Oil

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Franco's olive grove diary



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is put on hold, as their time, attention and energy are all focused on the olive trees, to check and gauge and get ready to pounce. [Read more](#)

A pressing business

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own thing and give out olive oil preserves this year? Cost-effective, healthy, tasty AND flavored with lots of TLC - it's the one gift no-one could ever resist! [Read more](#)

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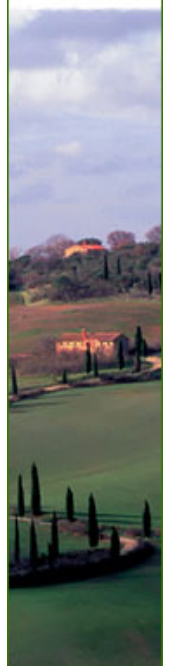


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We'd love to hear from you! Here's our email address oliveoil@chiantionline.com

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Franco's olive grove diary

Autumn is Franco and Matteo's favorite time of the year, and how could it be otherwise? Everything else is put on hold, as their time, attention and energy are all focused on the olive trees, to check and gauge and get ready to pounce.

Let us reassure you, dear olive oil friends. This year's season has been pretty good so far, although a bit extreme at times. We've had bouts of torrential rain and quite a few scorching-hot days, but all within reason and, apparently, quite to our olive trees' liking.

We are confidently looking forward to a good harvest, if the heavens continue smiling down on us. At this point in time it would take a truly frightful hailstorm to wreak real damage, which is unlikely - but unfortunately not impossible.

Barring that (please!), anything else should come in the "annoying occurrences" rather than "catastrophe" category. Now if we had to deal with such a massive crop as last year's, the outlook would be a little different. Such exceptionally good years are a mixed blessing, really. Of course it's both gratifying and exciting to be able to look forward to a veritable horn of plenty of healthy, juicy, happy, perfect olives! But coping with them really stretched our resources to breaking point.

Among last year's blessings, we were extra lucky to have a very mild, dry autumn. A rainy season would have made coping with nature's largesse much more difficult. Just imagine trying to keep heaps of olives free of mud and mould (not to mention harvesting them)! Thank Heaven that didn't happen. Last year's oil was some of the best we've ever made.

This year we're back to normal – meaning excellent, as usual; PORNANINO run of the mill perfection.

Seriously, the olives are getting on quite well. You can picture in your mind the wooded slopes of Chianti's hills turning golden-red as the vibrant colors of summer fade away to the tawny, mellow palette of autumn. Even the soundtrack is changing, as the cicadas pack up and prepare for

their long winter slumber, and birds head south towards warmer climates.

Only one thing never changes, quite oblivious to the never-ending ballet of the seasons. If you listen carefully, in the new-found hush of autumn, you'll hear the faint cluck-clucking of Franco's red tractor long before you can spot it among the trees.

They take it in turns, Franco and Matteo, to patrol the olive groves every day, climbing up and down the slopes. Checking, prodding, peering intently at the green fruit, trying to gauge when the right time will come. With an eye to the weather, because that's an important element in the equation.

By now you know as well as Franco and Matteo do that perfect oil comes from perfect olives. All the effort that went into caring for the trees all year long could be wasted in one careless moment. That's all it takes – wrong judgement, wrong timing, wrong handling.

Making olive oil sounds simple – you squeeze the berries and out it comes! Wish it were that easy, but it's not. Not if you're aiming for perfection, that is. And we are.

So wave to Franco and Matteo, as they stand guard to their beloved olive trees. And wish them *buon lavoro* (make a good job of it!), because they will need it. They're heading for the crucial time of the year were the reckoning comes and it's time for miracles.

Once again, we will attempt to weave nature's magic for you. Only for you, dear olive oil loving friends. And you deserve it.

Don't miss out on the miracle.

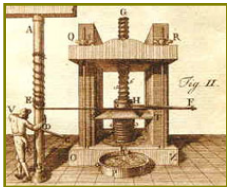
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**Don't stop buying Italian,
it will help us to keep buying American!**

A pressing business

It's a commonly held belief that all it takes to make olive oil is pressing the olives. Which is basically true, except that it's a little bit more complicated than that. Even without taking into account the "improvements" brought on by industrial technology.



Do you ever wonder how on earth do the bright ideas that shape the course of mankind ever spring up in some-body's mind? More to the point, who can have

realized that the bitter little fruit of the olive tree, though inedible as is, could be squeezed and the resultant liquid, once refined, could be put to a hundred uses. Not very straightforward, is it.

Yet somebody must have come up with it, and pretty early on to boot. Did a clumsy forebear stumble and crash to the ground right under an olive tree? Or was it a florid archaic matron who happened to lower her powerful *derrière* onto a little mound of olives?

However bright that seminal idea might be, though, it's a fact that tradition should not be followed blindly, or we'd be stuck forever in the same narrow rut. According to the Bible, the ancient Hebrews squeezed the berries with their hands during the exodus from Egypt, more than a thousand years before Christ. This might have been practical while traveling, but hardly efficient. No wonder the precious few drops of oil were reserved for ceremonial use, and jealously guarded by priests.

Olive oil, it was soon discovered, was far too versatile for its use to be restricted. People bent their minds to the task of improving on the hand-squeezing technique, and came up with the heavy grinding millstones that have been in use for over 3,000 years.

Thanks to them, olive oil soon became one of the ancient world's major commodities. Greek merchants traded it across the Mediterranean, spanning from the Black Sea to North Africa and Spain. Each city had its own distinctive jars, which served as a kind of "label" or provenance guarantee, and barbarian tribes were scornfully pitied as people who didn't know olive oil.

The uncouth barbarians were indeed missing something. It has been calculated that an Athenian adult who frequented the baths was

likely to consume up to 55 liters of olive oil a year - 30 l went for personal hygiene, 20 l for food preparation, 3 l for lightning, 2 l for worship and 0.5 l for medicinal use).

But there is more to making olive oil than the grinding of the fruit. When the berries have been mashed, the oil has to be extracted from them, which was initially made by pressing down hard with heavy wooden planks. This was obviously a bit crude, considering that olives only contain between 18 and 27% of their weight in oil. The next improvement was to spread out the olive paste onto mats which could be more efficiently pressed.

Since even mechanical presses had their limits, at the time it was indeed customary to press the olive paste more than once, hence the origin of outdated terms like "first pressed" which no longer apply to present day olive oil.

And as for separating the water from the oil, which is the third step in the process, the liquid derived from pressing was left to decant in large vats until the dregs fell to the bottom and the oil rose to the surface. Then it was skimmed with large shallow wooden spoons. The oil was stored in huge earthenware jars which could sometimes hold hundreds of kilos each.

This is how things were done for a very long time, and basically this is how they are still done today by a small legion of artisans (such as us) who have kept the tradition alive. But there were some serious flaws in the old way of doing things that just screamed out to be corrected. Some of the solutions devised along the way proved to be huge gaping pitfalls paving the way for commercial exploiting.

And if you want to know which is which, and what happens next, you'll have to wait until next issue. Stay tuned!

Oh, and don't forget to order your own little taste of history ...

[**Click here to order the new oil now!**](#)

Bottling time!

It's bottling time indeed, in more ways than just our own! With Christmas approaching, why don't you do your own thing and give out olive oil preserves this year? Cost-effective, healthy, tasty AND flavored with lots of TLC: it's the one gift no-one could ever resist!

Christmas presents are always tricky, granted, but this year the prospect is doubly daunting, what with the downturn and general soberness. It feels somehow out of place to splurge on useless gadgets and frivolities, and frankly most of us would rather not throw away hard-earned money right now.

Yet, heck, we're all entitled to cheer and celebrate in spite of the doom-sayers!



Of course you know what I'm going to suggest. We always remind you that Pornanino Olive Oil presents are the perfect choice – healthy, tasty, unique and the real thing, which is not something you come by easily. Actually, you'd have to be part of our olive oil loving circle in order

to grab a bottle. So if there's someone you really care about, do consider giving them some of the best olive oil money can buy. Honestly, it's true. And don't forget our hand-made, Pornanino olive oil-based soap – it's heaven for the skin, so gentle and soothing and truly nourishing.

But let's say you're looking for a smaller present, what we Italians call *pensiero* - a little something to say "I thought of you". Why not make something yourself, a simple preserve that will be enhanced by the pure magic of Pornanino Olive Oil. It's really simple, you'll see.

Olive oil has been known for millennia for its rare ability to extract and retain flavours and smells – which is why it was traditionally used as a base for perfumes. The simplest kind of gift consists in making flavoured oil – all the skill it takes is choosing an attractive little glass bottle, and for once you can forget that olive oil should be shielded from light; you'll just make a small quantity anyway. So buy a clear glass container, if you like, it'll set off the play of gold and color inside.

Fill the bottle with Pornanino olive oil and dip in any flavouring you like – a rosemary sprig, some garlic, hot chilli peppers, you name it. Just don't go overboard with the flavouring, as you don't want it to overpower the oil itself (it's a trick commercial producers use to mask the fact that the oil they are using is not up to par – NOT your problem at all).

Let's say you want to do something more sophisticated. Olive oil has always been the preferred medium in which to preserve vegetables, but you have to be a little careful here. Always wash the vegetables carefully, cook them with a measure of vinegar to prevent harmful bacteria from developing, and sterilize the jars to be on the safe side. You'll find a couple of really tasty, quick and easy recipes in Grandma Lia's column in the present issue. If you have access to the sort of sun-ripened tomatoes that peak between September and October, you can have fun doing tomato sauce. Just boil the tomatoes, peeled and roughly chopped, with a little chopped onion and garlic, if liked, until all the water has evaporated. Mix in a handful of fresh basil leaves and bottle while still hot. Seal, cover the jars in cold water, bring to the boil and simmer for 40' minutes. This way your sauce will keep for several months, and you'll thank heaven you made the effort when you take it out of the larder come winter!

Last but not at all least, you can make (and give) your own pesto. You'll find the recipe in the first issue of the Newsletter (access the Archive from our website www.oliveoil.chiantionline.com).

Make your olive oil presents with love and care, package them attractively and you can't go wrong!

Of course if you don't have the time or don't feel up to it, we'll be glad to help you make your family and friends happy. Just give them our wonderful olive oil!

[Click here to order the new oil now!](#)

Chianti: from rags to riches

Chianti's is a success story not unlike Cinderella's. Beautiful but very poor, it was scorned by the Tuscan grandees and all but ignored for centuries. Until one day a prince turned up and nothing was ever the same.

Why the obscure patch of hilly countryside stretching between Siena and Florence is known as Chianti is anyone's guess. Some say it echoes the name of a big Etruscan family, the Clante, who lived nearby in the first centuries before Christ; or it might have been derived from Clanis, as the Etruscans called a local creek.

Be that as it may, there's no denying the role the Etruscans had in shaping the country. It was that mysterious people that introduced agriculture and, more importantly, the grape. When the Romans took over, with their usual efficiency they encouraged the cultivation of their best-loved cash crop – olives – which indeed thrived in the stony soil.

Everything ground to a halt when the barbarians invaded, plunging Italy in the darkness of the Middle Ages. Picturing what Chianti might have looked like at the time is not at all difficult, since most of the walled-in villages and fortified farms that still dot the wooded slopes date back to that period. There are several wonderfully preserved medieval hamlets around Radda, Gaiole and Castellina, such as Selvole, Collepetroso, Tregole, Adine, San Marcellino, among the others.

Basically, though, what was carried on around there at the time was mere subsistence farming. And it didn't help the local economy that Chianti gradually became the favored battleground of the fiercely rival cities of Florence and Siena, who clashed several times over the centuries, having pledged allegiance to the great warring powers of the day – the Holy Roman Emperor and the Pope. Needless to say, on opposite sides.

Chianti was awarded to Florence in 1203, but that didn't stop the violence. The marauding armies of sundry conquerors crashed through on a regular basis, on their way to richer preys, wreaking havoc and contributing in spreading the plague. Peace descended at last in 1555, when Siena lost its crucial, final battle to Florence.

Peasants could draw a breath of relief, and settle down to reorganize themselves. Family plots were bought up by city investors and consolidated into

estates, which were then parceled up and leased to tenant farmers. In order to maximize yield, the steeper slopes were terraced and everywhere grape vines and olive trees were planted in alternating rows, with corn growing in-between.

Things were improving, yet our Cinderella was still waiting meekly by the fireside for her prince to come. When he arrived at last, one could legitimately wonder why it had taken him so long, since all he had to do was descend the stately staircase of his castle in Brolio (Chianti). His name was Baron Bettino Ricasoli, scion of a noble family that had owned the Brolio estate for centuries (he would go on to become Italy's first prime minister). Anyway, he tinkered with the local wine until he came up with such a remarkable blend of grape varieties that his own Chianti was highly acclaimed at the 1878 Grand Exposition in Paris.

Following Ricasoli's recipe, by 1924 Chianti had been established as one of Italy's major wines and a Consortium of producers was created in order to protect it – the Classical Chianti Consortium, whose emblem is a black cock on a gold background. But the Prince Charming effect was soon gone, and after the Second World War people began to move out of a depressed, miserable countryside heading for the bright city lights.

Beautiful Cinderella languished among the weeds and ruins, but rescue was in sight. Come the 1970s, as the big estates became liabilities and came up for sale, enlightened foreigners seeking to go back to the simple rhythms of nature snatched them up, invested time, money and passion in them and turned humble Cinderella into a global celebrity.

By the way, the wily Romans had been right after all. It's not just wine that makes Chianti proud. Its olive oil is just as prized. And if you don't want to be left out of the fairy tale, do remember to order your own little bit of magic straight away!

[Click here to order the new oil now!](#)

Grandma Lia's olive oil recipes

More bottling recipes to catch the flavour of the season and preserve it for the bitter winter months, sealed in a golden, shimmering pool of the best olive oil.

Preserved aubergines

**Aubergines
Pornanino extra vergin olive oil
wine vinegar
garlic cloves**

**chilli pepper
oregano
peppercorns
salt**

Quantities of course depend on how much you plan to make. Wash the aubergines and cut them in thin strips. Lightly scatter with salt and leave to drain for 30 minutes, then rinse and pat-dry. Bring enough liquid to the boil to cover them (half water and half wine vinegar) and cook for 3 minutes. Drain and pat-dry. Lay in perfectly clean, heat-resistant jars with air-tight lids or tops, together with the chopped garlic cloves, a few bits of Chili pepper, a few peppercorns, dried oregano and a pinch of salt. Cover with extra virgin olive oil and seal. The acidity of the vinegar should make sure that bacteria won't contaminate your preserve. To be on the safe side, though, you might want to sterilize your jars: once they're filled and sealed with air-tight lids or tops, put them in a very large pan and cover with cold water. Bring slowly to the boil and boil gently for 40 minutes. Let cool in the water and store in a dark, cool place.

Sweet and sour peppers

**2 lb fleshy sweet peppers
1 large onion
1 oz capers
4 oz black olives**

**2 tablespoons sugar
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup wine vinegar
Pornanino extra virgin olive oil
fresh or dried thyme**

Wash the peppers, remove the seeds and the white inner membranes. Slice them. Finely chop the onion and cook it with 4 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil until tender, then add the sugar, vinegar, capers, olives and thyme and cook for 5 more minutes. Add the peppers, season with salt and freshly ground pepper and cook over a low heat with a lid on for about 30 minutes, or until they are cooked through. Bottle immediately while hot, covered with extra virgin olive oil, using perfectly clean heat-resistant jars with air-tight lids or tops. The acidity of the vinegar should make sure that bacteria won't contaminate your preserve. To be on the safe side, though, you might want to sterilize your jars: once they're filled and sealed with air-tight lids or tops, put them in a very large pan and cover with cold water. Bring slowly to the boil and boil gently for 40 minutes. Let cool in the water and store in a dark, cool place.

Don't risk running out of your secret ingredient – Pornanino Extra Virgin Olive Oil

[Click here to order the new oil now!](#)



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