



THE *Pornanino* OLIVE OIL NEWSLETTER

No. 16, April 2010

Ben trovati dear olive oil friends! Spring is in the air, as the song goes - or was it love? Doesn't matter, the two go hand in hand! Isn't life just wonderful when the sun's kiss returns to a warm and balmy world? Indeed it is. Since we all feel energized at this time of year, why not grab the chance to do a little (or a lot of) personal spring cleaning, to rid our bodies from any winter-generated cobwebs. Spring is a time to shine inside and out, and the good news is that you don't need an expensive spa in order to detox. All it takes is good old Pornanino olive oil. Love yourself a bit more this year. Do it with olive oil!

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----- Franco's olive grove diary

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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

Winter is that rare time of the year when a farmer is entitled to take it easy. Very easy. Particularly when it's as cold and snowy as the season we just had to endure. Yet we did manage to find some interesting occupations indoors. You will never guess what we experimented with this winter.

It's been a long winter in our part of the world, and it started early to boot – by mid-December temperatures had dropped well below freezing. Not that we had time to notice, what with the bottling of the new oil, the packing and shipping and the paperwork. But our joints, ouch, they sure did notice! Not as young as we used to be ...

January was wet and snowy in turns, and generally dismal with that dejected feel you get after a party, when the guests have gone and silence closes in on the scattered debris.

Could it be guilt? You know, the kind you get when the bulk of the job is done, the adrenaline has subsided and you really can't be bothered with the loose ends still to be tied up, the indexing of files and sundry boring office chores.

Since olive trees at this time of year are sleeping together with the rest of nature, the only sensible way to spend January would be on a Caribbean cruise!

No such luck. Matteo had minor surgery scheduled for mid-month, after which he had to take it easy for a while. That meant an end to the cozy little projects Franco usually sets apart for the slow winter period, like digging trenches, putting up walls, laying down new piping and other muscular work.

February dragged on, just as miserably cold and wet as January. Of course this is not unheard of in Tuscany, but you always hope you'll get one of the milder winters, the kind with clear, sunny skies that cheer and energize. Not the case this year, that's for sure.

Since every dark cloud has a silver lining, though, it must be said that the risk of severe frost is higher in clear weather, and that is about the only thing olive trees can't endure. We'd take rain and snow any day if it meant keeping temperatures from plummeting too low.

So what do you do when you're trapped indoors for weeks on end, once you've finally come round indexing files and tying up loose ends? Correct, you sort through piles of dusty papers, clear the clutter from cupboards and desks and read the magazines you've been putting aside for months (years? Can it be that long?). Of course most of the relics that get unearthed end up in the dustbin. But among the rubbish we did dig up a few golden nuggets!

As you know a few years ago Franco started producing soap (hand-made by professional soap-makers) based on his own olive oil, and if you haven't tried it yet you should. Honestly, it's the mildest you can imagine.

Anyway, for a time he toyed with the idea of coming out with a full range of olive oil-based toiletry items, but at the time it seemed too complicated so the project was dropped.

While tidying up, we came upon the literature that had been collected while researching how wonderfully good olive oil is for our skin and hair – just as good for the "outside" as it is for our insides! Well, it made for some fascinating reading on a subject we had rather overlooked, if you can believe it, despite the rather hard proof of Franco's excellent soap.

Matteo's teenage daughters and wife Francesca, Franco's daughter, volunteered to give some old-fashioned olive oil beauty tips a try, although the girls did sneer a little at first. Olive oil just couldn't compare with the glamorous ads in glossy magazines – the "because you're worth it" kind of thing ...

But they had so much fun, and were amazed because humble olive oil really did the trick. This is why we are devoting the whole of this Newsletter to the nice things olive oil does to our body, inside AND out. Enjoy!



Meet Franco and PORNANINO Extra Virgin Olive Oil at the
Summer Fancy Food Show
June 27-29, 2010 • Jacob K. Javits Center, New York
Level 1 – Tuscany pavilion - Stand 4305

A truly magic touch

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Since you share our love for olive oil, you may have noticed that it's increasingly breaking out of the kitchen to invade the polished world of beauty salons. No self-respecting spa these days goes without its olive oil- enhanced body care line.

The trend is so noticeable that even drugstore brands are hopping onto the bandwagon. Just check the toiletries aisles and count the olive oil-enriched soaps, body lotions and sundry!

In theory this is nothing to be amazed at; one might just as well wonder why it took the industry so long to acknowledge something that's been known across the Mediterranean for countless centuries.

Of course the ancients couldn't fathom the whys and wherefores. They just knew olive oil worked, and thanked the Gods it existed.

We know better today. Science tells us that our skin is protected by a very thin layer called acid mantle, that acts as a natural barrier against outside aggression. Composed of the organic salts contained in our sweat and the lipids produced by sebaceous glands, it serves both as a waterproofing medium and to ward off infections thanks to its mildly acidic Ph. When the acid mantle is damaged, there is a loss of water that results in dryness and wrinkling of the skin, as well as in greater vulnerability to damage and infection.

Since olive oil has the very same acidity as the acid mantle that protects our skin, it can restore

what is taken away through washing, exposure and pollutants.

Its composition is so similar to the natural lipids of the skin that it is easily and fully assimilated, which means that it nourishes. Since water is naturally stored in the lipids, and that's what makes our skin firm and elastic, olive oil also acts as a moisturizer.

But that's not all. In addition to nourishing, moisturizing and rebuilding the acid mantle, it also contains soothing elements that ease irritations.

And last but definitely not least, it is particularly rich in vitamins and other compounds that counteract oxidation, a natural process in which free radicals are released that may lead to premature aging. Just imagine, according to an ancient Egyptian medical text dating from around 1500 before Christ, you can make the ultimate anti-wrinkle cream by mixing olive oil with milk, incense, wax and a few crushed cypress berries!

All counted, olive oil nourishes, moisturizes, protects, soothes and leaves our skin healthy and looking younger. The same of course goes for hair, which share many characteristics of the skin.

What is wonderful about that is that it's wholly natural - pure natural chemistry. One word of caution, though. For the magic to work you have to use extra virgin olive oil, and cold-pressed, because otherwise there's no guarantee that all of the properties we've been talking about are still there and active. Some vitamins are destroyed by heat and would not survive the high temperature processing most commercial olive oils go through.

As the advertisement says, treat yourself to the best - because you're worth it!

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What is olive oil exactly? It is way beyond our limited understanding to provide a comprehensive answer – that would take a chemist, and a good one to boot. But we can attempt to highlight the main features of our beloved green gold, begging any scientists' pardon for the wild simplification. Here we go!

Put in a nutshell (olive pit?), olive oil is a fat. No earth-shattering news there, to be sure.

Let's get a little deeper than that. "Fat" is a generic term no self-respecting scientist would use. The correct form is fatty acid and there are several kinds.

When discussing healthy eating the first distinction refers to the three main categories: saturated, polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fatty acids. We'll spare you the specifics. Suffice it to say that saturated fats have the disadvantage of promoting the accumulation of cholesterol in the blood vessels, which in the long run is dangerous to our health; the main sources of saturated fats are animal fats, such as butter and lard, and palm/coconut oil. Polyunsaturated fats have the opposite effect of wiping away both "bad" LDL and "good" HDL cholesterol, which is undesirable on balance; seed oils are a major source of unsaturated fats.

There is a little (or a lot) of each category in every fat we eat, in different proportions. Olive oil contains a very high percentage of monounsaturated fatty acids, to be more precise oleic acid (between 55 and 83% depending on soil, quality and growing conditions) and palmitoleic acid. Is that a big deal?

Indeed it is. Monounsaturated fatty acids are thought to reduce the risk of coronary heart disease, as evidenced by the FDA-approved health claim on extra virgin olive oil labels. In addition to that, there is a good share of linoleic acid, which is a polyunsaturated fatty acid but also one of only two compounds our body cannot produce by itself – but needs in order to function

properly. This is why linoleic and pal alpha-linolenic acid are called "essential fatty acids" and must be supplied in food.

As far as fatty acids go, olive oil happens to have the winning mix: lots of heart-protective monounsaturated fats, quite a bit of can't-do-without polyunsaturated oleic acid and just enough saturated fatty acids to get the benefits while dodging the down-side. But that's not all.

In addition to the fatty acids that make up the bulk, olive oil contains quite a few more interesting bits. Let's have a closer look at the so-called unsaponifiable fraction minor components, which should make up at least 1.5% of the total (the remaining 98.5% is fatty acids). Squalene, sterols and polyphenols are arguably the pick of the lot.

Since research is ongoing about the many-fold virtues of olive oil, there's still a lot to be discovered about the effects of those exotically named compounds. But here's a run-down. Polyphenols, which are most abundant in extra virgin olive oil, have powerful antioxidant properties that might be responsible for the protective effect it has on heart and blood vessels. Squalene (also found in shark liver, hence the name) is thought to have a role in preventing cancer. Sterols, or more precisely phytosterols, have become household names for their ability to reduce cholesterol.

Last but not least we should mention oleocanthal, which is responsible for the peppery-bitter taste of extra virgin olive oil and is a natural anti-inflammatory and antioxidant. And a special mention should go to tocopherol, the correct term for vitamin E, a powerful free-radicals destroyer.

So good. Just make sure you get the real thing, cold pressed extra virgin olive oil, or you'll be taking in all of the calories (there's no avoiding those) and none of the benefits!

Want something special? Try our own olive oil-based hand-made soap! [Click here](#)

Beauty and the beast

It may not be able to turn the beast into a handsome prince (or beautiful princess), but olive oil can nonetheless do wonders for our skin and hair – or pelt ... All natural and easy to use, it has been Mediterranean women's closest ally for centuries. Here are some time-tested beauty tips just waiting to be rediscovered.



In all fairness (excuse the pun) we can't claim that using olive oil will turn you into a hunk or pin-up, particularly if you appreciate the culinary appeal of a fragrant bruschetta. And goodness, as a friend of ours you should.

Barring that, olive oil is an amazingly effective and versatile beauty aid. It is seldom allergenic, but do take care if you know you are at all sensitive. Try it on a small patch of skin before splashing it all over your face (and please don't sue us if it doesn't work for you!)

Hopefully we should have managed to explain more or less why olive oil is such a staunch ally for our skin and hair. So let's have a look at how to turn its wonderful properties to our advantage. There are really lots of ways, and some are just what your local spa would treat you to – for a hefty charge!

Let's say your hair is looking dry, lack-luster and frizzy. All you need is a little extra virgin olive oil in a bowl. Bush your hair first, then part it and gently massage some olive oil on the scalp proceeding until you have covered the whole head, down to the nape. If you have long hair make sure you brush some down the lengths as well. Wrap a towel round your head to keep it warm, or use a plastic shower cap, and just relax for half an hour. Then wash your hair with a mild shampoo. Olive oil is a godsend if you have dry dandruff, and it's good even for oily hair.

For extra shine try adding the juice of half a lemon to the olive oil; mixing in an egg yolk you'll get a super nourishing formula. If what you are looking for is just conditioning, try applying an emulsion made with equal amounts of water and olive oil to wet hair you have shampooed once; leave on for five minutes than shampoo again and rinse.

Once you've fixed your hair, there's no reason why you shouldn't pamper the rest of your body the same way. Olive oil is wonderfully skin-friendly, even on the face. Used pure on damp

skin it will act as a moisturizer, keeping the skin soft and supple. It's great to remove make-up, particularly around the eyes, and in time it will smooth wrinkles (expect no major miracles, though). Mixed with some sugar or salt it will make an excellent exfoliator, which you can follow with a mask (best for dry skin) made up of one egg yolk, one tablespoon of olive oil and a few drops of rose water.

Now let's take care of your body. First, scrub it with a mix of olive oil and coarse sea salt. Then soak in warm water laced with a few tablespoons of olive oil. Dipping your nails in olive oil mixed with a few drops of lemon juice will strengthen them. Olive oil will work wonders for dry feet and hands – cover with cotton gloves/socks and leave overnight. It's excellent also for chapped lips. It's actually good all over – Greek athletes used to rub it on to keep their bodies supple. A gentle massage with warm olive oil eases the ache from tired muscles.

AND it's an excellent substitute for shaving cream!

Sometimes details count. Give your luscious olive oil experience an added dimension by blending in a few drops of a scented essence. It could be lavender, which also has a calming effect, or any other you like. Whatever perfume you choose, make sure it's organic and get it from a reputable retailer where you can get advice about the individual properties of different essential oils. Stay well away from synthetic rubbish!

Which also applies to olive oil, of course. Choose cold pressed extra virgin olive oil, and make sure it's the real thing. Stay well away from phony look-alikes! They promise but won't deliver, because the precious properties of the olive are no longer there.

Do you need to be reminded of that? Of course not. Go ahead, you have your Pornanino nectar. Get ready to unveil a gorgeous, olive oil-rejuvenated new you!

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Grandma Lia's olive oil recipes

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Struffoli (serves 10)

Dough

1 ¼ lb all-purpose flour
4 eggs + 1 yolk
2 tbs granulated sugar
3 oz butter
6 tbs lemon liquor (*limoncello*) or rum
1 tbs each grated lemon and orange peel
pinch of salt
Pornanino extra virgin olive oil to deep-fry

Garnish

13 oz honey
colorful sugar strands (*confettini* or *diavoletti* in Italian)
4 oz each candied orange and cedar peel
2 oz candied pumpkin

Work together the flour, eggs, butter, sugar, orange and lemon peel, liquor and pinch of salt. Shape into a ball, let rest for 30 minutes then cut into fist-sized chunks. Slice them and roll onto a floured surface to form long strands as thick as a finger. Cut each strand into small bits about as large as a hazelnut. Deep fry in batches until golden brown in plenty of hot olive oil (test temperature by dropping in a small bit of dough: it should float right back to the surface, sizzling). Drain and set aside, spread out over kitchen paper. Melt the honey over a low heat (or in a bain-marie) in a rather large pan, tip in the struffoli and gently and evenly coat with the runny honey. Fold in half the sugar strands and candied peel. Arrange on a serving platter in a mound; if you want it to be the traditional crown shape put a glass jar in the middle of the dish and arrange the struffoli all around: you'll remove it when the honey has cooled down and solidified. Garnish with the remaining sugar strands and candied peel. Well wrapped in cling-film the struffoli will keep for about 10 days, and some maintain that it actually improves by being left standing for a few days before eating. This recipe makes for crisp struffoli. For a softer texture add a teaspoonful of baking powder to the dough.



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



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