



THE *Pornanino* OLIVE OIL NEWSLETTER

No. 2, October 2006

Hello everybody and welcome back to the *Pornanino Olive Oil Newsletter*! Thank you for the flattering comments you sent us regarding our debut issue, we hope you will enjoy the second just as much. But before you dive right in, please let us remind you that the **NEW OLIVE OIL WILL BE READY FOR SHIPPING AT THE END OF NOVEMBER**. The only way to get it is through our web site: make sure you [order it now](#) or you'll risk missing out until the 2007 harvest! As a rule we only ship it once a year, between the end of November and the first week of December, within a few days of pressing. So if you want it, you have to grab it fast – or wait until next year ...

Have fun now, and if you want to get in touch with us you can email us at newsletter@chiantionline.com. We really look forward to hearing from you!

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Extra Virgin
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simply,
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Franco's olive grove diary



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[Read more](#)

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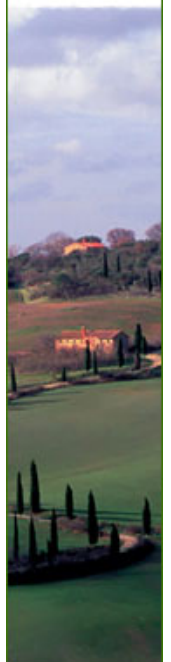
Something sweet to greet the holiday season, easy to bake and sure to promote lots of cheer and

goodwill. Ho ho ho! [Read more](#)

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Franco's olive grove diary

All hands on deck, please. It's harvest time!

It's actually more of an orange alert as yet. Taking into account the last several years, Franco predicts that the olives won't be ready for picking until the second week of November, at the earliest. But he also knows how important it is to plan ahead; with little time to spare, operations must run as smoothly as a well-oiled (you bet!) machine. Everyone is ready to spring into action. There will be a crew of hired hands, professionals who can pick fast and efficiently and who'll see to the main groves. And then there's the family, including Franco's little granddaughters, aged 10 and 12, and a plethora of relatives, friends and acquaintances who join in the excitement for a day or two just for the fun of it. They're all expected to lend a hand for as long as they stay, of course, but then city-born and bred folks actually seem to *enjoy* toiling in the fields – go figure them!

For the time being, though, things are still on hold as Franco prowls the slopes, peering intently at his beloved olives, squeezing and prodding them to gauge how long it will take for them to reach just the exact degree of ripeness he's looking for. This is really important, because if you pick them too early the oil content will be low and the flavor harsh and bitter. If you wait too long, on the other hand, the natural oxidation will have set in, resulting in higher yield but lower quality – you get more oil, but lose on flavor and shelf life.

So you want to strike the golden moment when the balance is just right, because the first rule of olive oil making is adamant: good oil comes from perfect olives. No room for compromise here.

Olive trees are hardy. They can survive temperatures as low as -10°C (that's very cold by Italian standards) and dry, baking-hot summers without complaining too much. They get by under duress but they're not happy, and might only bear fruit on alternate years or shed them all before they reach full maturity, which takes between six and eight months depending on local conditions and tree varieties. So if you want perfect olives you can't just sit in the shade waiting for Mother Nature to take care of things! Franco is always on the lookout in summer, when the ripening olives are particularly vulnerable to lack of water. When

a prolonged dry spell hits, the trees need to be watered, otherwise the olives might get so shrunkened they "die" and just fall off. Too much water, however, might not be a good idea either, as excess water will increase the size and weight of the olives but not their oil content. They will take longer to harvest and press, but the yield in terms of oil might be even lower than average.

By October, with the worse of summer heat long gone and with it the risk of hailstorms, all Franco has to do is replenish the soil with nutrients and keep an eye on his beloved olives. Once they're ripe they will cling to the tree for about two weeks before dropping to the ground of their own accord. People used to drape nets under the trees to catch them, or beat the branches with wooden poles and then raked up the fallen fruit. So much easier, isn't it? Unfortunately the quality of the olives is impaired if they are left too long on the tree – and you only get good oil from perfect olives. So how do we know when the time is right to pick them? Well, olives are technically called drupes – fruits with a stone, just like prunes or peaches. And just like them, they gradually change color and get softer to the touch. Now, olives come in many different varieties (in Italy we grow over 470 cultivars). All of them are green most of their life, even those that will turn black when they are completely ripe. Franco, who grows four different varieties, has learnt by experience how to read the signs. Remember, he wants his olives slightly unripe. So he checks every day, noticing how the purplish tinge darkens to blue-black, and the acid green mellows to a deep, golden hue. Waiting for the right time. Aiming for perfection.

Which is very nice, but so much HARD work! We'll tell you all about it next time, when the ordeal of picking, and pressing and bottling the new oil is over and done with. It's going to be an extra long diary entry – get ready for it! And if you want to read it while leisurely nibbling at the very best bruschetta your side of the ocean, don't forget to order your supply of the new olive oil now. Once you have it just toast the sliced bread, brush it with a generous helping of our green gold and enjoy. So much work but well worth it, don't you agree? Mmm, yes. Definitely.

I love olive oil so much I'd bathe in it!

What a great idea. Don't just eat it; let the olives work their magic all over you - inside and out. Yep, that's right. Olive oil is wonderful for the skin.



Well, it makes sense. The reason why olive oil is so good for us is that it's magically, and naturally, compatible with our body chemistry. The gifts it bears are all gratefully accepted and totally assimilated. It truly is a perfect match and it doesn't only work on our insides.

Our skin is protected by a very thin layer called acid mantle, which is composed of the salts contained in sweat and by the lipids (i.e. fat) produced by sebaceous glands. Since it's mildly acidic, it acts to protect the skin from outside aggression by bacteria and fungi but its main function is to retain moisture. When the acid mantle is damaged, our skin is more exposed to infection and, as it loses water, looks wrinkled and dry. Perhaps you've noticed that people on a low-fat diet tend to have thin hair and a sagging skin. That's because water is naturally stored in lipids, so you can't have one without the other, and water is what makes our skin firm and elastic. Our body needs fatty acids in order to function, and the skin is no exception.

By composition olive oil is nearly identical to the natural lipids that protect the skin, down to the mildly acidic PH. Therefore it reinforces and rebuilds the acid mantle, and since it's easily

absorbed it also helps build up the skin's stores of lipids and water, so it both nourishes and moisturizes. But that's not all. Olive oil contains soothing elements that ease irritations, and it's particularly rich in vitamins and other compounds that counteract oxidation, a natural process in which free radicals are released that damage the cells, leading to premature aging. So you see that bathing in olive oil is actually quite a good idea - if you don't mind the oiliness, that is.

The ancients knew all about the amazing properties of olive oil, and used them to their advantage in many ways, including beauty. The very first soap we know about was made with olive oil, in Babylon some 5,000 years ago, and the tradition survived along the centuries until the early 1900s, when industrial production began in earnest and the old ways were discarded. This is actually a pity, because mass-produced detergents are not nearly as friendly to our skin.

We, on the other hand, love to do things the old way and just hate to see the wisdom of our forefathers going to waste. So we have scouted Italy to find someone who could offer us all the advantages of modern research applied to the recipes of old and have come up with an olive oil soap based on the very same top quality first cold pressed extra virgin olive oil we bottle for food consumption. It's professionally hand-made the traditional way, and so incredibly mild that it can even be used for baby care.

Of course you don't have to buy our hand-made soap in order to enjoy the wonderful properties of olive oil. Just try rubbing some PORNANINO cold-pressed extra virgin olive oil all over your body straight from the bottle, as the Greek athletes and the ancient Romans used to do. It really works!

[Would you like to try our soap? Click here](#)

Customers say: "I have spent several months comparing your lovely soap product to several other natural soap products. My husband and I think yours is the best. As an owner of a small unique specialty spa, I am interested in purchasing your soap." Susan, WI Thank you!

Santa's olive oil presents

Uh-oh, the jolly season is approaching fast but don't panic. Here are a few gift ideas guaranteed to make everyone happy

With Christmas around the corner, don't you wish you could e-mail Santa a list and just forget all about it. He's the professional; he's got the know-how, experience and skills to manage the tricky business of present giving. Plus, he's got faithful elves to help with logistics and a whole train of flying elks for home delivery – satisfaction guaranteed. Too bad he doesn't exist.

So we're stuck with the tiresome routine of figuring out what to give, going shopping, gift-wrapping and sending, all the while hoping that Joe and Mary and cranky Aunt Kate will have the decency to at least pretend they enjoyed the present. Okay so forget Auntie, who would still complain if you gave her the Koh-I-Noor diamond (how could I ever wear something that big – honey, it's so tacky!).

We won't waste our time with the likes of her, but is it really unthinkable to find the "one size fits all" gift? The wonder present you can give to friends, family, acquaintances and colleagues without cringing at the thought that it might not be the "right" thing? You know that sinking feeling you get when it's too late, you've handed over the package, all nice and shiny and *wrong* ...

As you can expect, given our line of business, we think we have an answer to the dilemma. Look, we genuinely believe we have the wonder present and it's not an empty boast. Why don't you give them each a bottle of Pornanino olive oil – or two, or a case, depending on how much you love them. You would be giving away some of the best olive oil on the market, a totally natural luxury that tastes great and makes our body happy. Whoever said that good things are always bad for us? Also, Pornanino olive oil is only available through our website because our production is tiny – just

about 6,000 bottles a year. Only a very lucky few have access to it, which makes for a truly unique present. Just like a rare vintage wine.

Maybe this year you can spare yourself the hustle



of shopping around for mass-produced items nobody really needs (or wants). Just do the math and order as many bottles as you think you will need, keeping in mind that the new oil will be ready for shipping at the

end of November and should be delivered to your home by the first week of December. Perhaps it would be wise to order a couple of extra bottles, just in case you had forgotten the odd present. If you have second thoughts later, we might not be able to guarantee delivery by Christmas, so order all you need now.

And you might also consider our hand-made olive oil based soap, the most skin-friendly you'll ever have the pleasure to use. Its extra smooth lather and fresh lemony scent are sure to please even Auntie Kate. She won't tell you, for sure, but don't be fooled by her sneer. Hang on a minute, though. Why should we lavish our wonderful, lovingly hand-made olive oil and soap on undeserving souls? Get her a box of chocolates at Wal-Mart!

[Would you like to order? Click here](#)

Customers say: "I just finished the last bottle of olive oil that I received from you last December. The oil was MOLTO BENE! I plan to order more this December." Barbara, MA Thank you!

Chianti through the seasons

Most people travel to Tuscany in the summer. And miss the subtle charm of the off-seasons.

Of course visiting the Chianti area during the summer months makes perfect sense. While it can be hot during the day, evenings are pleasantly cool - just perfect for an al fresco dinner. And you'll never have problems sleeping like a baby, even though air-conditioning is unheard of outside of the fancier hotels. Houses are still made of thick stones, which keep out the heat so that inside it's always fresh. Also, you can count on extra long daylight hours and the cheerful bustle of fellow travelers to spice things up a bit in the usually sleepy little towns. On the down side, though, it can get a little too crowded at times.

So let's have a look at the pros and cons of planning a trip to Chianti in the off-season. Autumn is a personal favorite of ours, and a time when there's a lot going on. With most of the tourists gone, people get down to the serious business of producing wine and olive oil, as they have been doing for countless generations since well before the area became an international attraction. October is harvest time for grape-growers and an anxious time at that, since a whole year's toiling in the fields could be wasted if it rains too much before the bunches have been brought in. A hailstorm could spell disaster, but rot and mould can be just as harmful. Yet harvesting too soon would result in inferior wine, so it really is a gamble and it's no wonder that when it's over, whole communities celebrate with centuries-old country fairs.

In November the spotlight is trained on the olive groves, with truly hectic activity going on to pick, press and bottle the new oil as quickly as possible. Then, when the job is done, peace descends on the countryside as people anticipate the coming of Christmas. Autumn in Tuscany is a wonderful time, with crystal clear skies and the most beautiful fall colors turning the woods all shades of gold. It's a season for connoisseurs who shy away from the summer crowds and just perfect to soak up the ageless mystique of the place, undisturbed. When dusk begins to gather, shrouded in mist, you can do as the natives do and contemplate the pleasures of life in front of the fireplace, with roasted chestnuts and a glass

of Chianti wine. Or you can try your hand in the kitchen, cooking one of the hearty soups or venison stews especially concocted by tradition for the cold season.

Despite shrinking daylight hours and plummeting temperatures, Chianti in December is guaranteed to make you feel as if you'd just stepped into a living nativity scene, as farmhouses and villages up and down the hills all light up in preparation for Christmas. There are many Christmas markets offering local foodstuff and handicrafts, and it's worth having a look around the churches to compare the *presepi*, as crèches are called in Italian. This is a much older tradition than Christmas trees and Santa, which actually only arrived in Italy after WW2 and have since become the symbols of the season. Most families still own a *presepe* and take very great pride in arranging dozens of tiny figures around the Holy Family. Some nativity scenes are as elaborate as miniature villages, with flowing streams and waterfalls, moving figurines, houses, workshops, cobbled little streets and even sound effects. Since most churches in Chianti have been around for a thousand years, it's not uncommon for them to harbour very ancient *presepi*.

To be quite honest we don't feel we can recommend January and February, as everything just seems to go to sleep (including people). Also, most dirt roads are likely to be frozen over, which makes driving around neither safe nor pleasant - there are quite a number of dirt roads in Chianti ... Things definitely pick up around Easter, which depending on years may come late in March or in April. Easter holidays are a favorite for Italians, who by this time have done enough hibernating and are looking forward to being outside in the sunshine. So expect crowds, but also plenty of religious festivals and wonderful Easter fare. May is just gorgeous, with the countryside awash in a thousand shades of green and wild flowers blooming away like mad. It's the perfect time for a hike and you really shouldn't miss it if you plan to walk or bike it, particularly since from mid-June onward it can get uncomfortably hot, and dusty on the dirt roads.



The PORNANINO Olive Oil 2007 US tour is coming up!

Would you like us to come to your hometown next spring? Read how.

Going on tour to the United States is something we have come to look forward to over the years. At first it was more business than pleasure – if you can imagine it, Franco used to be nervous at the thought of speaking in front of an audience, he worried that his English wasn't good enough, that people would be bored and leave the room in disgust ... Well, we're glad to inform you that it didn't happen. People actually sit through Franco's presentations AND ask questions afterwards!

Of course his subject matter is fascinating and much more complex than meets the eye. If you tried your hand at the test in our Newsletter's last issue you might have come to realize it (if not stay tuned – more tests will come in future). In principle, olive oil making should be a pretty straightforward process: you grow the olives, pick them, press them and bottle what comes out. That doesn't sound very complicated, does it. Actually it wouldn't be if producers all played by the rules and if regulations, both in Italy and the US, were designed to promote quality over gain. Which they don't.

When Franco bought his Chianti estate he had no farming experience whatsoever, having worked in the building industry most of his life. He was just looking for a nice place to retire. And he got hooked to olive oil. In just a few years he found out how many scams are up even in the idyllic Tuscan countryside – healthy olives mixed with rotted ones, good local oil blended with imported, you name it. He talked with people, snooped around, researched, experimented and eventually decided to build his own press (most small producers take their harvest to outside presses, like people used to bring corn to a mill, so as to cut costs). Franco now sees to the whole production cycle himself. He knows exactly what goes into his olive oil.

What Franco has learnt along the way has fired his enthusiasm for olive oil – and left him disenchanted about the ambiguities of the trade. And that is what prompted him to go on tour once a year, to raise consumers' awareness about both the good and the evils of olive oil. To put it in a nutshell, olive oil's global success is leading to its

downfall. As world demand increases, with millions of bottles flooding mass-retailers' shelves, quality standards are bound to deteriorate. What you get for a few dollars at your local supermarket is a thin, tasteless and sterile golden liquid that barely resembles olive oil. It's not harmful, mind you. But if it doesn't taste good, and has lost most of its vitamins and health-improving natural compounds to industrial processing, why should you buy it? Yet, is forking out twenty bucks a guarantee that what you are getting is the real thing?

There are so many interesting things that could be said about olive oil. Franco's presentations usually last about 45 minutes, but if unchecked he could carry on and on for hours ...

We'd like some Italian food to be served, so that people get a chance to taste Franco's olive oil (which we will provide) to see for themselves what we are talking about, but apart from that any venue will do just fine. Just keep in mind that we'll be asking a small fee to help us with travel expenses. Please send us an e-mail and we'll be delighted to provide further details.



Franco in USA :

1st / 5th December 2006, Corner Cooks, Winnetka IL

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- 18nd April, Southern New Hampshire University,
Manchester NH

- 20th April, Fitchburg State College, Fitchburg MA

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- April, to be defined, Colorado CO

- September, to be defined, South California CA

One last thing: Franco's olive oil seminars are FUN! **Bring your friends!!**

If you think you'd like Franco to come and talk at your club, to your friends, your local community center or whatever please send your request to newsletter@chiantionline.com.

Grandma Lia's olive oil recipes

Something sweet to greet the holiday season, easy to bake and sure to promote lots of cheer and goodwill. Ho ho ho!

Grandma's bread cake (makes a 10 in round tin)

11 oz. stale bread – any kind

1 egg

½ cup sugar

3 oz chocolate chips

½ cup raisins

¼ cup PORNANINO extra virgin olive oil

peel of half a lemon

2 tablespoons pine nuts

Make sure that the bread is stale. If it's not, let it stand for a couple of days until it's really hard, then soak it in warm water. Squeeze all of the liquid out, put the mashed bread in a bowl and beat in the egg, sugar, PORNANINO olive oil, raisins, chocolate chips and grated lemon peel. Put the mix into a greased baking tin, level it considering that it should be about 1 inch thick, scatter the pine nuts on top and drizzle with a little PORNANINO extra virgin olive oil. Bake in a moderate oven (350° F) for about 70 minutes, or until it's brown and crispy. It's best served straight away, either warm or cold.



Spongata cake (makes an 8-inch cake)

1 cup and a half all purpose flour

4 tablespoons sugar

half a stick of butter (2 oz)

Filling

1/3 cup runny honey

½ cup crushed biscuit crumbs

½ cup ground almonds

½ cup ground hazelnuts

½ cup ground walnuts

3 tablespoons candied orange peel (zest)

2 tablespoons PORNANINO extra virgin olive oil

white wine

pinch of salt

1 tablespoon raisins

1 tablespoon pine nuts

ground cinnamon, coriander, pepper and nutmeg

1 tablespoon brandy

Don't be put off by the long list of ingredients. It's really quick and easy to make, and will keep up to three weeks well wrapped in foil. You can bake several smaller cakes and give them to your friends for Christmas! Make the filling at least one day in advance: boil the honey together with 2 tablespoons of white wine over moderate heat for a couple of minutes. Remove the saucepan from the heat and incorporate the crushed biscuit crumbs, ground nuts, and spices (about 1 teaspoon in all). Cook for a few minutes over moderate heat, then remove and add the chopped candied orange peel, raisins, pine nuts and a tablespoon of brandy. Mix thoroughly and let stand covered with cling-film for at least one day.

To make the pastry, combine all the ingredients in the food processor, adding a little white wine to loosen the mixture – mind that it should be quite firm. Work until smooth, then cut in two and roll out each half onto a floured surface to form two 8-inch rounds. Put the first round onto a baking tray, pile the filling on top of it and cover with the second round. Pinch the edges to seal in the filling, brush with a little PORNANINO extra virgin olive oil and bake in a moderate oven (350° F) for about 30 minutes or until slightly golden. Dust with icing sugar when cold.

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