



# THE *Pornanino* OLIVE OIL NEWSLETTER

No. 9, July 2008

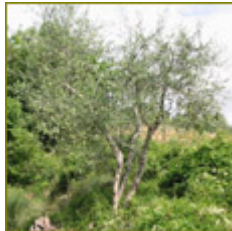
Greetings from not so sunny Italy, dearest friends, and how are you doing this summer? Ours so far has been a joke, with tantalizing bits of sunshine and endless rainy days. But one should not complain, right? Most of Italy had been suffering from a prolonged drought over the last couple of years, and now that nasty bit of trouble has been fixed at last. Always look at the bright side - we're definitely not having to cope with the heat, either. So all is well over here, apart from a disappointing summer that could still mend her ways, if she wanted. Summer is feminine in Italian, remember? Come on girl, come on out and shine!

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## Franco's olive grove diary



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battling with lush weeds and wildly sprouting trees at a time when the Tuscan landscape should have turned its typical burnt sienna hue. [Read more](#)

## Positively fat

Over here in Italy people get really weight-conscious in summer, when the time comes to don skimpy dresses and bathing suits. Working on the assumption that it's the same all over we're giving you a quick run through on fats. [Read more](#)

## Olives, olives everywhere! And not a Martini in sight ...

We all share a healthy love for olive oil, but have we ever spared a thought for the innocent fruit that gets squeezed to a pulp in the process? Here's to little olive, with many thanks for the wonderful bruschettas (and Martinis) it's selflessly given us. [Read more](#)

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Our little Italian phrasebook has been such a success we've decided to come out with part 2, so if you're flying over this summer you'll get a chance of learning some more useful words. Signore e signori, avanti!

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## Grandma Lia's olive oil recipes



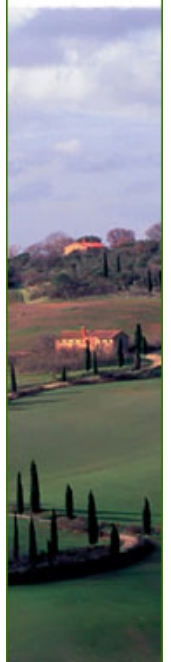
Let's celebrate the olive this summer. Italian traditional cooking is full of the little

things, especially when the hot weather dictates that we eat light vegetable dishes. Light on the stomach, that is, but with plenty of zest and taste! [Read more](#)

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We'd love to hear from you! Here's our email address [oliveoil@chiantionline.com](mailto:oliveoil@chiantionline.com)

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## Franco's olive grove diary

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**Usually in summer you have to be on the lookout in case it gets too dry. Not this year. We're still battling with lush weeds and wildly sprouting trees at a time when the Tuscan landscape should have turned its typical burnt sienna hue.**

According to one of the best-loved commonplaces in Italy, the weather is no longer what it was in the old days, my dear – *non ci sono più le mezze stagioni* (the mid-seasons are gone). People are very fond of complaining that it's winter cold one day and summer hot the next, shaking their heads at the sad departure of spring and autumn.

Well, this year spring has come back with a vengeance! And she seems a bit out of sorts.

In an ideal world spring would bring gentle rains to help ease nature out of its winter slumber, then summer would take over with just the right amount of heat needed to grow and ripen, plus the occasional thunder storm to keep the soil from drying out.

This year it just keeps raining and raining, as if summer had decided to take a vacation instead of doing her job. Can you believe it – the weather has been so dismal we didn't even fill up the swimming pool until a couple of weeks ago. It just wasn't worth the effort.

One of the reasons why olive groves and vineyards flourish in Tuscany is because they positively thrive in the rocky soils where nothing else would grow, and even enjoy the dry, hot summers. Their roots run deep, and if anything they dislike the dampness of wet earth.



Of course, being hardy old trees, they are not complaining. We are!

Summer in Tuscany usually sets in by June, with temperatures which soar through July and gently subside come mid- to late August. The three summer months are crucially important, because this is when the olives develop and grow. And like any other young living thing, they are particularly vulnerable at this stage.

Here in PORNANINO we are lucky in that our hillside groves are free of the pest of all pests, the extremely dangerous white fly that preys on most olive groves the world over. Just imagine, in a single growing season it can breed seven generations and destroy the entire crop. Most farmers have to spray their olive trees in summer and keep their fingers crossed. We don't have to worry about that.

Then, in a typical summer, we would have to monitor whether the trees need watering, as some moisture is needed for the fruit to develop otherwise it could shrivel and drop. Too much water, on the other hand, would be counter productive as it would swell the olives to jumbo proportions without necessarily boosting their oil content, which means it would take us longer to harvest and press with little to gain in terms of yield. Obviously so far we haven't had a choice, have we.

But there's still time for summer to mend her ways, and if she does after all the rain we've had we could be looking forward to a spectacular harvest. Besides, it's all part of the wonders of nature that not two years are alike. Consistency of flavor is the hallmark of industrial production and we want none of that, thank you very much! We whole-heartedly embrace the muted, subtle little ripples in color and flavor that mark each and every growing season as utterly unique.

Trust us. Franco and Matteo are patrolling the groves in their rainproof gear (and very large umbrellas), making sure that everything is as it should be. You are warned: we want you to go WOW! when you taste the new oil!

## Positively fat

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**Over here in Italy people get really weight-conscious in summer, when the time comes to don skimpy dresses and bathing suits. Working on the assumption that it's the same all over we're giving you a quick run through on fats.**

Except for the lucky souls who live in the tropics, there is no worse time of the year than the first summer day when, pale and sickly-looking after a long winter, we try on brightly colored outfits that burst at the seams ... yet they fitted when we last wore them! Quite flatteringly, too.

It's downright depressing, no question about that. So what is to be done (after picking up the pieces of our self-esteem)? Oh well, it's not the end of the world and if you had a good time over winter it's probably been worth the extra pounds. Celebrate with a shopping spree and get yourself some nice new clothes, but mind you don't go overboard because here comes step two, and it says "get back in shape"!

The first thing that comes to mind when thinking of calories is fats, as if they were the first and foremost cause of weight gain. Fats would make you fat, wouldn't they – it's in the name! Alas, not quite. If you went on a totally fat-free diet without controlling your sugar and carbohydrate intake as well, would you get any slimmer? Hardly. Yet your body would notice and complain.

Lipids, proteins and carbohydrates are the three main kinds of little bricks that make up all living cells. The human body can't function properly without them – all of them! Current recommendations generally agree that fats should cover about 30% of our daily calorie intake (55% carbohydrates and 15% proteins). This means that nearly one third of the calories we eat every day should come from fats. Cutting out lipids altogether is not a good idea, as it would upset the body's balance down to the loss of skin tone and lacklustre hair.

Now for the bad news. If it's true that our body needs a bit of everything, what really makes the difference between healthy and not so good is how much you take! Unfortunately the recommended daily calorie intake is roughly 2000 for women and 2500 for men, which doesn't really

leave much room for manoeuvre. Kiss comfort food goodbye for a while, or step up the exercise!

In fact the daily requirement varies. Since calories equal energy, how much you need depends on how much you burn. A lumberjack will need more calories than a bank clerk; you'll need more on a hiking trip than you would to drive yourself to the stores etc. If you eat more calories than you use up, the excess will be stored away as fat. Cutting them down too drastically would be very unwise, though, as you won't just slim down, you'll starve. That's easy. Keeping track of the calories you take is a little more complicated.

If you need to lose more than a few pounds you had better see a dietician. If all you're looking for is getting back in shape you could try checking the calorie content of the food you buy, as printed on the package – you're in for a few unexpected surprises! For instance, did you know an 8-oz bag of crisps packs in a whopping 1241 calories?

Just remember: 1 teaspoon of sugar (4.2 g) equals 16.3 calories; 1 teaspoon of any vegetable oil (4.5 g) equals 39.8 calories; 5 g of butter has slightly less, 35 calories (it has a higher water content); 1 cup of all-purpose white flour (125 g) makes up 455 calories. As you see whether we're talking about carbohydrates (they get broken down into sugars), lipids or sugar, the calorie count is not all that different.

So beware so-called diet products that boast a low fat content – they might still be brimming with sugar and carbs! Always check the nutritional facts on the package before buying something. And if you catch yourself reaching for a fat-free sugar-free anything goes piece of junk ask yourself if you really want to eat a synthetic look-alike or if you wouldn't be better off with a nice healthy salad (vegetables are genuinely light) with a drizzle of authentic, pure, natural Pornanino olive oil. There go 40 calories worth their weight in gold.

## Olives, olives everywhere! And not a Martini in sight ...

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**We all share a healthy love for olive oil, but have we ever spared a thought for the innocent fruit that gets squeezed to a pulp in the process? Here's to little olive, with many thanks for the wonderful bruschettas (and Martinis) it's selflessly given us.**

Let's get rid of the boring facts first. Technically the fruit of the olive tree is called a drupe, meaning that the pit contains one or two seeds, which puts it in the same league as peaches and plums. Unlike



them, though, the main reason why something like 800 million olive trees are grown world-wide is not their sweet taste, but rather their oil content.

Altogether from 20 to 30% of an olive is made up of oil, which is distributed all over: 1% in the skin, 70% in the flesh and 29% in the pit. In Italy alone over 470 different varieties are grown, but around the Mediterranean there are reckoned to be thousands. Although yield, oil content, shape and size vary wildly, there are two characters that never change, no matter what. Each and every olive starts life green-colored and turns to brown or black as it matures. And they all taste vile.

Cultivation of the olive is as old as the civilizations that blossomed around the Mediterranean, and it does tell us something about the stubbornness (or astonishing vision) of our forebears that they bothered to find ways to put the unassuming, bitter-tasting olive to such wonderful use. Take it from us: you wouldn't want to be the first person who picked it straight from the tree and popped it in his mouth.

Yet people in Crete were eating olives as early as 3,500 years before Christ, having mastered the technique to get rid of the chemicals that confer them the bitter taste. By 1000 BC olives had reached Egypt and thanks to the Phoenicians had spread around the Mediterranean. Around 600 BC the Romans possessed a merchant marine and a

stock market just for the oil trade. And the rest, as they say, is history.

Thankfully the good folk of Crete did a thorough job. If they had just focused on getting the oil out we would have missed the garnish for our Martinis! Actually, the market for table olives is quite big worldwide, although of course not as big as that for olive oil. Olives have been a staple of Mediterranean cuisine for millennia.

When they are meant to be eaten, olives can be picked at different stages and this is the reason why they come in different colors – green olives have been harvested when still unripe, whereas black ones are allowed to mature on the tree. And the same goes for all the shades in between.

Once picked, table olives have to be cured. This can be done by steeping them in a lye solution, traditionally wood ash, to get rid of the bitter taste and soften the flesh (most important in green, unripe ones); or in salt brine. Using lye is quicker, just 24 hours instead of several weeks, but purists maintain that it spoils the flavor, the texture and the color of the olives. Mission olives, for instance, are actually green olives turned black by lye curing and oxygenation (i.e. industrial processing). Ripe, black ones can also be dry-cured, which makes them characteristically shrivelled.

Cured olives then go back to pickle in salt brine, olive oil or a vinegar solution, sometimes with the addition of herbs and spices. The larger are often stuffed with hot peppers or sweet mignon onions, but we frankly prefer them plain so we can fully appreciate their characteristic flavor.

If you are lucky enough to find a good selection of naturally cured ones, do try as many varieties as you can. You'll see how astonishingly different they taste. And you'll understand why their gift of olive oil is such a wonderful masterpiece.

## Mamma mia, the ultimate Italian phrasebook II

Our little Italian phrasebook has been such a success we've decided to come out with part 2, so if you're flying over this summer you'll get a chance of learning some more useful words. Signore e signori, avanti!

**B**uongiorno e benvenuti to the second instalment of our (hopefully) useful little Italian phrasebook. As you'll no doubt remember, we have already established that the Italian language is complicated because, much like its cooking and most things Italian, it seems to be essentially made up of a vast body of exceptions, variations and inconsistencies. As a whole, we seem unable to stick to a rule - which is great for creativity, flexibility and thinking outside the box, but hell when it comes to grammar!

Not to worry, though. No one expects foreigners to speak Italian at all, so you'll surprise and delight most natives with just a few words.

In the first part of our phrasebook we dealt with the bare essentials. Now let's try to string together two or three words. Dài (come on)!

**Dov'è la stazione?** (*dòve è la sta-tsiò-ne*)  
Where is the railway station?

**Dov'è l'albergo?** (*dòve è l'al-bèr-go*)  
Where is the hotel?

**Da che parte è il centro?** (*da ke pàr-te è il tchèntro*)  
Which way is the town center?

**E' vicino?** (*è vee-tchèe-no*)  
Is it near?

**E' lontano?** (*è lon-tà-no*)  
Is it far?

**Posso andare a piedi?** (*pòs-so an-dà-re à pee-è-dee*)  
Can I walk there?

**C'è un autobus?** (*tchè oon aooto-bòos*)  
Is there a bus?

**Dov'è la fermata?** (*dòve la fer-mà-ta*)  
Where is the bus stop?

**Dove compro il biglietto?** (*dòve còm-pro il bee-lièt-to*)  
Where can I buy the ticket?

**Quanto costa?** (*kooàn-to cò-sta*)  
How much does it cost?

**Accetta la carta di credito?** (*atch-èt-ta la càr-ta dee crè-dee-to*)  
Do you accept credit cards?

**E' troppo caro** (*è tròp-po cà-ro*)  
It's too expensive

**Vorrei spendere meno** (*vor-rèi spèn-de-re mè-no*)  
I'd like to spend less

**Non mi piace** (*non mee peeà-tche*)  
I don't like it

**Ha qualcosa di meglio?** (*à kooal-cò-sa dee mè-lee-o*)  
Do you have anything better?

**Vorrei una camera con vista** (*vor-rè-ee oona cà-me-ra con vèe-sta*)  
I'd like a room with a view

**Vorrei una camera con bagno** (*vor-rè-ee oona cà-me-ra con bà-neeo*)  
I'd like a room with a private bathroom

**Vorrei una camera matrimoniale** (*vor-rè-ee oona cà-me-ra ma-tree-mo-nee-à-le*)  
I'd like a double room

**Vorrei una camera doppia** (*vor-rè-ee oona cà-me-ra dòp-pee-a*)  
I'd like a twin room

**Vorrei una camera singola** (*vor-rè-ee oona cà-me-ra seen-gò-la*)  
I'd like a single room

**Quanto costa per notte?** (*kooàn-to cò-sta per nòt-te*)  
How much does it cost per night?

**La colazione è inclusa?** (*la cola-tseeò-ne è een-clòo-sa*)  
Is breakfast included?

**Dove posso cenare?** (*dò-ve pòs-so tche-nà-re*)  
Where can I have dinner?

**Dove posso pranzare?** (*dò-ve pòs-so pran-zà-re*)  
Where can I have lunch?

**Vorrei un ristorante tipico** (*vor-rè-ee oon ree-stò-ran-te tèe-pee-co*)  
I'd like a typical restaurant

**Vorrei una pizzeria** (*vor-rè-ee oona pee-z-ze-rè-a*)  
I'd like a pizza place

**Devo prenotare?** (*dè-vo pre-no-tà-re*)  
Do I have to reserve?

**Vorrei prenotare un tavolo per due** (*vor-rè-ee pre-no-tà-re oon tà-vo-lo per dooe*)  
I'd like to reserve a table for two

**A che ora?** (*a ke ò-ra*)  
At what time?

**Questa sera alle otto** (*kooè-sta sè-ra al-le òt-to*)  
Tonight at eight

**Questa sera alle otto e mezza** (*kooè-sta sè-ra al-le òt-to e mèz-za*)  
Tonight at half past eight

**Vorrei un tavolo all'aperto** (*vor-rè-ee oon tà-vo-lo al-l apèr-to*)  
I'd like a table outside (open air)

**Buon appetito!** (*boo-òn ap-petèe-to*)  
Enjoy your meal!

**Vorrei il conto** (*vor-rè-ee eel còn-to*)  
May I have the bill please

**Stà scherzando!** (*stà sker-tsàn-do*)  
You must be joking!

Stay tuned – next time we'll see how to complain

## All about **YOU**

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Yes, of course we have posted some fresh pieces of news! Come on in and have a look ...

### The new website is up!

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We had been meaning to redesign our website for a while and finally got round to it! A restyling was really overdue ... Will you like it? We do hope and trust you will - we made it ourselves, like we do everything else here on the Pornanino Estate. Franco's son-in-law Matteo spent quite a number of long winter evenings working away at his computer, and we suspect he actually had rather a good time doing it! Please check it out and tell us what you think of it - you'll find it at [oliveoil.chiantionline.com](http://oliveoil.chiantionline.com)

FYI - in the new site you'll also find all the back numbers of the Newsletter and the latest news.

### Selling like hot pies

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Sorry folks, the 2007 Pornanino olive oil is **sold out**. We've shipped the last bottles and won't be able to send out any more until the fall, when the 2008 new oil comes in. As you know our production is tiny and demand sometimes exceeds available stocks, which is

why we always warn our friends to order a year's supply in December or risk going without! If you have run out of Pornanino nectar don't despair - get proactive and pre-order now! Olive-oil lovers seem to be getting greedy, which makes us really proud. Thank you everybody for making our hard work worthwhile!

### AAA - olive pickers wanted

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A good friend of ours from the United States who's been visiting us for years recently decided to share the wonderful experience of olive harvesting in Pornanino with small groups of kindred souls. He takes care of all travel arrangements and will make sure a couple of days' labor picking olives with Franco and his crew are included, as well as lots of wonderful food and exclusive sights and activities. If you want to come over and see how your olive oil is made, please visit Terry Hart's website at:

[web.mac.com/terencehart/OliveHarvest/Home.html](http://web.mac.com/terencehart/OliveHarvest/Home.html).

You'll find lots of wonderful photos, too!



## Grandma Lia's olive oil recipes

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Let's celebrate the olive this summer. Italian traditional cooking is full of the little things, especially when the hot weather dictates that we eat light vegetable dishes. Light on the stomach, that is, but with plenty of zest and taste!

### Condiglione (serves 4)

1 ¼ lb tomatoes

1 cucumber

1 red or yellow sweet pepper, large

5 anchovy fillets, preserved in olive oil

¼ lb black olives

2 potatoes, medium-sized

2 eggs

1 small bunch of basil

extra virgin olive oil

vinegar

Boil the potatoes in plenty of cold water, with a lid on, until they are cooked through. Drain, peel and set aside to cool. Hard boil the eggs: put them in a small saucepan covered with cold water, bring to the boil and cook for 10 minutes. Drain and set aside to cool before peeling them.

When the potatoes are cold, slice them and put them into a salad bowl together with the sliced tomatoes and cucumber. Cut the pepper into quarters, remove the seeds and white inner membrane, and slice it as well. Remove the bone from the olives and roughly chop them. Roughly chop the anchovy fillets and shred the basil leaves, well rinsed and pat-dried. Combine all the ingredients in the bowl, season with salt, vinegar to taste and a generous drizzle of extra virgin olive oil. Mix thoroughly and garnish with the hard-boiled eggs, either quartered or cut into rounds. This traditional salad comes from the Liguria region.



### Caponata (serves 4)

2 lb aubergines

1 lb ripe tomatoes

14 oz onions

¼ lb celery

12 green olives

1 tablespoon capers

1 tablespoon sugar

3 fl oz vinegar

extra virgin olive oil

Wash the aubergines, dice them and sprinkle with salt. Put them aside to drain for 20 minutes. Thinly slice the onions and cook them in 2 tablespoons of olive oil until they are soft and golden. Add the tomatoes, peeled, deseeded and diced, together with the celery cut into matchstick-sized fillets. Add the capers and olives, bring to the boil and cook until all the liquid has evaporated. Rinse the aubergine cubes, pat them dry and fry in plenty of olive oil (or toss with a little olive oil in a hot non-stick frying pan for a few minutes). Drain on kitchen paper and add to the tomato sauce, together with the vinegar, sugar and a pinch of salt. Boil until the vinegar has evaporated. Serve your caponata either warm or cold, as an appetizer or side dish. This recipe, which comes in countless variations, is typical of Sicily.

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