

Bring A Touch Of Spain Home For The Holidays

(NAPSA)—While you may not be able to witness the annual olive harvest in Spain yourself, you can take advantage of this great tradition by incorporating an olive oil tasting into your next party. You and your guests will discover a secret that culinary insiders have known all along: the best olive oils are from Spain.

Spain is the leading producer of olives and the world's leading producer of olive oil. Starting in November, olives are harvested from the more than 300 million olive trees covering more than 8,800 square miles—an area comparable to the size of Massachusetts.

Throw Your Own Olive Oil Tasting Party

Like fine wines, olive varieties, terrains and growing conditions produce numerous flavors and tastes. Experts use more than 24 terms to describe olive oil—from peppery to fruity, ripe to sweet. You can easily create an olive oil tasting at home. The following tips will help.

The Preparation

Party preparation is easy. Start by cutting several loaves of white bread—or any bread with mellow taste—into small cubes one-half to one inch thick. Next, pour a variety of extra virgin olive oils into small dishes. The olive oil tasting is as simple as dipping a piece of bread into the oil and then tasting. To really taste like the experts from Spain, pour one teaspoonful of oil into a shallow tumbler or shot glass. Next, draw it quickly into the mouth, mixing it with air to register the sensation of all the nuances of flavor.

The Tasting

To enjoy the process of tasting, you needn't possess any expert knowledge. Savoring the flavors is as easy as using the nose and taste buds. It's really about appreciating the scents and flavors of the individual oils.

Before tasting, sniff the oil to take in the fragrance. The best



oils will have a detectable scent that's fresh and somewhat fruity.

Sipping water in between tastes is always good, but the best way to experience the change in flavor between oils is to take a small bite of green apple between tastes.

Learn the Language

Below is a short list of key tasting terms to help get you started:

- **Peppery** is the term used to describe a “bite” in the back of the throat.
- **Bitter** is similar to the taste of green olives. Considered a positive aspect, a bitter characteristic can be more intense and biting, or more mellow.
- **Fruity** is reminiscent of the odor of ripe, fresh fruit. Such oils are best used uncooked, such as over fresh vegetables or as a base for salad dressing.
- **Ripe** also refers to a fruity taste obtained from ripe olives; usually mild and sweet.
- **Sweet** describes a pleasant, but not sugary, taste; often found in mellow oils. Almond flavor is associated with sweet oils that have a flat scent. Such oils do well when paired with a dessert recipe.

For All Your Holiday Cooking

To best experience the fine qualities of olive oil from Spain, keep several bottles in your pantry. There are at least four main types of olive oil to choose from:

- **Extra Virgin Olive Oil**—Considered the finest, this oil has the most intense flavor and is the best quality.

- **Virgin Olive Oil**—Simply the olive juice. While it is like extra virgin olive oil, it conserves the flavor and vitamins of the fruit.

- **Olive Oil**—Like some types of wines, olive oil is really a blend of refined and virgin oils. Variation in the mixture provides the flavor and characteristic of each oil.

- **Light Olive Oil**—Similar to olive oil, this is a blend but mixed with a smaller proportion of virgin oil giving it a lighter color and milder flavor.

While fresh olive oil is the best, it's recommended that home cooks use olive oil within one to one and a half years.

For more information, recipes and olive oil facts, visit www.oliveoilfromspain.com.

MOTHER PEPA'S GARLIC SHRIMP

One pound small shrimp, shelled

Kosher or sea salt

5 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil from Spain

3 tablespoons minced garlic

2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley

2 tablespoons amontillado (medium-dry) sherry

Sprinkle the shrimp with salt and let sit for 10 minutes. In a shallow casserole, preferably earthenware, heat the oil with the garlic and parsley until the garlic begins to sizzle. Add the shrimp and stir until they are opaque. Add the sherry, salt to taste, and cook over medium heat for a minute or two until the sherry evaporates and the sauce thickens slightly. Serve immediately, in the casserole.

Serves 5 to 6.

Recipe from “La Cocina de Mama: The Great Home Cooking of Spain” by Penelope Casas.