

February is Heart Health Month

Here are some Recipes that Utilize Olive Oil

Scientific research has indicated olive oil can assist in the fight against heart disease, cancer, diabetes and Alzheimer's. The polyphenols in olive oil are antioxidants, which have also been shown to help fight diseases including some type of cancers. Olive oil is also known as one of the best sources of monounsaturated fatty acids, a type of fat that has been shown to improve blood cholesterol levels.

The complex flavors of extra virgin olive oil deliver great taste and an excellent nutrient profile that make it an enjoyable part of a healthy diet. From lowering the risk of heart disease to delivering an abundant supply of cancer-fighting antioxidants, the health benefits associated with extra virgin olive oil continue to grow. Cultures that consume olive oil regularly such as those eating a Mediterranean diet are often cited as having some of the best health in the world.

In previous decades, Americans were encouraged to consume a low fat diet, but research has pointed to the dangers of that advice and to the health benefits of consuming specific dietary fats. Today, more Americans are heeding the advice to include more health-promoting fats in their diets such as the monounsaturated fat found in extra virgin olive oil.

Extra virgin olive oil is derived from the unprocessed fruit of the olive tree. During processing, the fruit is simply crushed to extract the oil content at a temperature no higher than 86 degrees Fahrenheit, thus preserving both its nutritional benefits and complex flavors. By contrast, canola, corn, soybean, and vegetable oils need to be chemically-extracted, refined, bleached and deodorized. With its minimal processing, extra virgin olive oil is essentially a fruit juice.

Extra virgin olive oil contains uniquely high levels of oleic acid, about 75%, compared to 60% in canola and corn oils. This monounsaturated fat helps reduce overall blood cholesterol levels by lowering LDL (often referred to as "bad") cholesterol levels in

the blood while maintaining and, even increasing, HDL (often referred to as "good") cholesterol levels.

A diet rich in monounsaturated fats, like those found in olive oil, nuts, and seeds, plays a protective role against many diseases, including heart disease, stroke, type-2 diabetes and metabolic syndrome.

One characteristic that sets extra virgin olive oil apart from other oils is its extremely high levels of polyphenols. These compounds act as antioxidants and protect cells against unwanted inflammation and disease, including various types of cancer and atherosclerosis. Extra virgin olive oil contains more polyphenols than other olive oils.

High levels of the antioxidant vitamin E in olive oil also protect cells from damaging free radicals. Vitamin E is often recommended to support skin health and reduce aging effects. Another antioxidant in olive oil, oleocanthal, is the same substance found in the drug ibuprophen and is thought to be responsible for the pungent taste in olive oil.

By storing extra virgin olive oil in a cool, dark place in a closed container, the high nutrient levels are preserved longer. The fresher the oil, the higher its nutrient profile. Extra virgin olive oil should be purchased within 12 to 18 months of its harvest date. Look for the harvest date embedded in the COOC Seal or notated somewhere on the bottle. Once opened, most olive oils should be consumed within 6 months.



✂ Shrimp Salad with Sundried Tomato Vinaigrette ✂



This recipe features protein-rich shrimp, colorful corn and cherry tomatoes and a zesty sundried tomato vinaigrette. Roasting the veggies with olive oil first adds a nice flavor and actually increases your body's ability to absorb the cancer-fighting lycopene compound.

- 1/2 cup frozen corn (no-salt added)

1/2 cup cherry tomatoes (sliced in half)

1 Tbsp. extra virgin olive oil, divided

salt and freshly ground black pepper

1 head romaine lettuce

8 oz. shrimp (thawed, tails trimmed)
- 2 Tbsp. red wine vinegar

1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil

1 1/2 tsp. prepared mustard

1 Tbsp. chopped sundried tomato

1 clove garlic, roughly chopped

1/2 medium avocado

Preheat oven to 450 degrees F.

On sheet pan place corn and halved tomatoes and toss with 2 teaspoons oil until evenly coated. Season with salt and pepper (you can also add some granulated garlic for more flavor.) Roast about 10-15 minutes or until tomatoes begin to tighten up.

Chop lettuce to desired leaf size.

In sauté pan add 1 teaspoon oil and heat to medium high.

Add shrimp to pan and season with salt and pepper.

Once shrimp has tightened up and turned pink (approx. 4 minutes.) Remove from heat.

In a small bowl, whisk together vinegar, mustard, sundried tomato and garlic. When well mixed, slowly add the oil in a small stream; the dressing should bind together and look uniform throughout with no separating of oil and vinegar. Season with salt and pepper.

Slice avocado in half and remove pit. Cut slices while still in the skin and scoop out with a spoon.

Arrange lettuce on plate or bowl and top with roasted tomato and corn and avocado. Drizzle with vinaigrette and top with shrimp.

Salad: Makes 2 servings. Per serving: 310 calories, 17 g fat (2.5 g. saturated fat), 23 g carbohydrate, 22 g protein, 11 g dietary fiber, 670 mg sodium.

Sundried Tomato Vinaigrette: Makes 3 servings. Per serving: 170 calories, 18 g fat (2.5 g. saturated fat), 2 g carbohydrate, 0 g protein, 0 g dietary fiber, 35 mg sodium.

SOURCE: The American Institute for Cancer Research



✂ Gaea's Cucumber Salad with Fresh Herbs, Orange Segments & Citrus Dressing ✂

- 6 small cucumbers

Sea Salt
- Dressing

1/2 cup Gaea's Sitia, Crete D.O.P Greek Extra Virgin Olive Oil

Juice of 1 lemon

Salt

Fresh ground black pepper

Fresh ground pink pepper

2 large oranges

1 Tbsp. fresh rosemary

1 Tbsp. fresh oregano

1 Tbsp. fresh thyme

1 Tbsp. fresh mint

Wash cucumber and oranges well.

Peel oranges, remove white membrane and cut fresh in thin slices.

Thinly slice cucumber with a mandolin.

Combine salt and two kinds of pepper in glass or stainless steel bowl and add lemon juice. Slowly add olive oil while stirring constantly with wire whisk.

Combine dressing with orange slices and fresh herbs.

To serve: Arrange cucumbers in dishes and pour over prepared dressing. Sprinkle with a little coarse salt.

Makes 4-6 servings.

SOURCE: Gaea Fresh Extra Virgin Olive Oil