

# What to Look for When Buying Olive Oil

[Melanie Pinola](#) and [Elizabeth Yuko](#)  
6/19/19 3:13PM • Filed to: FOOD



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We've all got a bottle of olive oil in the pantry—it's [one of the most versatile ingredients](#) in a cook's arsenal, good for everything from dressings, to dipping, to cooking. But there are a few factors to consider when selecting the ideal bottle for your specific kitchen needs. As you stare down the zillion olive oil options at the grocery store, here are a few things to look for on the label.

## **Check the date**

You're probably used to checking for dates on refrigerated items like milk and eggs, but don't forget to do the same with your olive oil. According to the [UC Davis Olive Center](#), better producers will let you know when the olives were harvested. Opt for [the most recent harvest](#) which is usually November and December in the northern hemisphere (like producers from California, Italy and Spain) and May and June in the southern hemisphere (like producers from Australia or South America).

But, don't be fooled by the "best by" date on a bottle of olive oil, as that tends to be two years from when the bottle was *filled*—not when the olives were processed. This makes it an unreliable indicator of quality, according to UC Davis. For example, extra virgin olive oil is [best used within 18 months](#) of the harvest, so it may go off before the "best by" date.

## Look for a quality seal

If you want an olive oil that meets stricter guidelines than the USDA's minimal standards, you may want to look for a quality seal from producer organizations like the California Olive Oil Council (COOC) and the Australian Olive Association. They require olive oil to meet higher quality standards. But don't just grab the first bottle with a gold seal: other seals may not offer the same quality assurance, according to UC Davis.

You can also look up which olive oils have received these quality seals on the [COOC](#) and the [North American Olive Oil Association](#) (NAOOA) websites.

## Understand the different types

There are different types of olive oil, which can make the buying process a little confusing. [As we've explained previously](#), you're likely to see three different types of olive oil in the store:

- **"Regular" olive oil:** The bottle will just say "olive oil" or "pure olive oil," in an attempt to rise above its station. This is usually a blend of virgin and refined olive oil, which means at least some of it has been heat- and/or chemically treated. It has a pretty neutral flavor, and can be used for all-purpose cooking.
- **Extra virgin olive oil:** "EVOO," if you're a food blogger from the aughts. This is the good, unrefined stuff that has the most color, flavor, and antioxidants. You could use this for cooking—just know that it has a pretty low smoke-point (325 to 375°F), and that [high-heat cooking will obliterate the oil's flavor](#), so save the fancy stuff for [finishing](#) and (maybe) some light sautéing.
- **"Light" oil:** This oil is not lacking in calories, but in flavor and color. It is refined, and has a higher smoke point of 465°F, so feel free to use it for frying.

Have an idea of what you'd like to use the olive oil for before you go into the store and use that to determine which type you buy.

## Look for the region of origin

This is where things can get a little murky. [According to the NAOOA](#), federal laws require olive oil manufacturers to list the place of origin, but that can mean a few different things. In [an](#)

[interview with Serious Eats](#), oleologist Nicolas Coleman explains that the important part is that [a bottle lists the country and region of origin](#).

Any good brand of olive oil will let you know exactly where it came from, so that in itself is telling of the quality. [Simply saying “product of Italy”](#) isn’t enough, he notes, because that could mean it was just bottled and shipped out of Italy, rather than actually produced there. Also, [as the NAOOA notes](#), blending of olive oils from different countries is common in order to achieve specific flavor profiles, so don’t be alarmed if more than one country or region is listed.

As far as whether certain olive oil-producing regions are better than other, it’s like apples and oranges. Coleman says that no single country or region has a monopoly on “good” olive oil, and that high-quality olive oils are being produced in Australia, North and South America, North and South Africa and the Mediterranean.

### **Pay attention to the container**

Olive oil should be protected from heat and light, so [storing it in an appropriate container is important](#). According to UC Davis, ideal containers are made of dark glass, tin, or even clear glass largely covered by a label or placed in a box. And don’t ignore shelf-placement at the store: if the bottle is on the top shelf and exposed to a lot of light, it could hurt its quality, the [COOC notes](#). The same goes for dusty bottles (meaning it’s probably been sitting for a while) or oils with an orange tint (indicating over-exposure to fluorescent lighting and/or heat), according to [guidelines from the NAOOA](#).

*Editor’s note: A previous version of this article, originally published on 11/8/13 and updated on 6/11/19, referred to the findings of two reports from the UC Davis Olive Center, published in [2010](#) and [2011](#). In an email to Liferhacker, a representative from the UC Davis Olive Center explained that the brands listed in those reports as not meeting certain olive oil standards have since made improvements. The representative specified that the best way for consumers to select an olive oil would be to educate themselves using resources provided by UC Davis as well as organizations like the COOC and NAOOA, all referenced in this article. This story was updated on 6/19/19 to provide more thorough and current information.*