

<http://www.thestar.com/living/food/article/804575--different-varieties-of-olive-oil-land-on-shelves-in-canadian-shops>

## Different varieties of olive oil land on shelves in Canadian shops



To taste olive oil, warm glass slightly in your hands, then take a good sniff. Finally, slurp it into your mouth, swirl to coat your tongue, and try to detect different flavour notes. **RICK EGLINTON/TORONTO STAR**



By [Jennifer Bain](#) Food Editor

# Olive oil really is the new wine.

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No longer are Canadians content to buy just one variety in bulk (usually a cheap Italian or Greek supermarket oil). Now they're clamouring for tastes of oils from places like Turkey, Palestine, Argentina, California, France and Morocco.

They're learning that oils might come from just one variety of olive, or from a blend of olives. They're mindful of whether a corporation or an artisan has made the oil.

They're curious about the stories that olive oils have to tell.

At the [Spice Trader & Olive Pit](#) in Toronto, the hottest new oil is Sublime. It's produced on the Provence property of former governor general Adrienne Clarkson and her essayist husband John Ralston Saul. The \$45 bottle is packaged with a story and photos crafted by Saul.

Sublime is just one of 30 extra-virgin olive oils sold at the Queen St. W. shop. Oils cost between \$14 and \$65 and come from small-scale producers in places like Chile, Peru, Argentina, California, Italy, Spain, Morocco, even Lebanon.

"There's such a variety of flavours," says store co-owner Allison Johnston. "It's like anything — if people can taste it and learn a little bit about it, they really like it."

To that end, the store has a permanent oil tasting station where people can try oils on their own or with bread.

Olive oil hunters know to troll fine food stores for the latest offerings.

Su Goral and Gokhan Gokyilmaz were thrilled when Scheffler's Deli & Cheese in St. Lawrence Market agreed in March to carry their Turkish olive oil, [Zeï](#).

To create Zeï, the food-loving couple connected with artisan growers and millers in Ayvalik, a region renowned for its olives and oil. Their first batch of oil, made from adramitiani olives harvested in November, is fruity, green and fresh with hints of arugula and a smooth finish.

"We wanted to bring this oil here in a way that doesn't make it look inaccessible," says Goral. Zeï retails for about \$15 for 500 millilitres and is already in 15 fine food stores.

When Goral goes to stores to demo Zeï, she must sell Turkey along with the oil.

"Most people, when you say Turkey, they say 'Turkey?' because they don't know that Turkey is a top-level olive oil producer in the world," she says. "Turkey doomed itself as no name by shipping so much oil as bulk without brands. Its oil is silent filler in other people's mass production."

Still, many Canadians know and love Turkey. Oils from other countries can be a harder sell.

When Robert Massoud started selling [Zatoun](#) olive oil from Palestine here six years ago, he chose an unconventional route. Zatoun is a Fair Trade oil and sales benefit Palestinian farmers and children. He sells about 30,000 bottles a year (for about \$20 per 750-millilitre bottle) through churches, student groups, community groups and bookstores. [Ten Thousand Villages](#) is his biggest single distributor.

"It's not marketed as a gourmet olive oil," stresses Massoud. "It's really a grassroots oil for everyday people to connect them in a very meaningful way to farmers and producers who are living under very difficult circumstances. People will buy it the first time, perhaps, for solidarity, but they come back because they love it."

Zatoun found a fan in a Trent University professor who went on to research the global impact of olive oil.

"Palestinian olive oil provides the maximal contrast to Tuscan olive oil, which benefits greatly from the positive imagery associated with its location," anthropology professor Dr. Anne Meneley wrote in 2008. "Palestine, on the other hand, is not imagined as a desirable place to go — it is seen as a site of danger, which affects the trajectory of the marketing of its olive oil."

Another country gearing up to convince Torontonians to buy its olive oil is Argentina. The Federal Council of Investments of Argentina has invited select trade, grocery and media guests for a debut sampling of more than 20 oils from 10 producers next week.

The council notes that like wine, olive oil's quality and character is affected by terroir, climate, production methods and storage. Both wines and oils can be blended, come in varieties, offer distinctive flavour profiles and can be tasted in much the same way.

"North Americans know Argentina's bounty of gourmet foods and wine, and now our olive oil will take its rightful place on the culinary stage," predicts the council's secretary general Juan Jose Ciacera.

Spanish olive oil is also trading on its country's reputation for fantastic food.

To promote her award-winning Spanish oils, Dolores Smith of the Olivar Corp. teamed up with three Toronto chefs for an April 28 dinner. The \$130 meal at Frida Restaurant & Wine Bar featured Spanish wine pairings with six courses prepared by Lola Csullog-Fernandez of Pimentón Spanish & Mediterranean Fine Food, Luis Valenzuela of Torito Tapas Bar and Jose Hadad of Frida.

Guests sampled Full Moon, Oro San Carlos, Rincón de la Subbética, Gasull, Dauro and Parqueoliva oils from Spain's Extremadura region. The chefs worked the oils into dishes like oil-poached Ontario Tamworth pork belly and olive oil sorbet with lavender.

The oils sell for \$15 to \$50 at fine food stores.

Smith, a Spanish-born, Toronto-based oil promoter, feels that when it comes to olive oil we are "really about 15 years behind, just as we were with wines.

"The challenge, really, is that in general the Canadian palate has had very little experience with different varieties of olive oils. People are now actually looking at the value they can get from a well-made olive oil."

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