

## We Don't Have to Buy Foreign Oil! by Mary Silveira

Were you one of the children who proudly flaunted five fingers with an olive stuck to each one as you paraded around the holiday table? The olive has truly grown in the United States and specifically in California, out-distancing the holiday table, to enjoy heights of culinary demand and industry certification for its oils and its numerous gift ideas.



With historical roots in the biblical world, up to 95 percent of the world's production is still commercially produced in the Mediterranean. The earliest known olive oil use is 2000–3000 B.C. Needed for cooking and lighting, the first recorded oil extraction is from the Hebrew Bible and is said to have taken place during the exodus from Egypt, during the 13th century B.C.

Oil was derived through hand-squeezing berries and storing them in special containers under guard of the priests. A commercial mill for non-sacramental use of oil was in use in the tribal confederation and later the Kingdom of Israel in 1000 B.C. More than 100 olive presses have been found in Tel Miqne (Ekron), where the Philistines also produced oil. These presses are estimated to have had output of between 1,000 and 3,000 tons of olive oil per season.

Most global production comes from Southern Europe, North Africa and the Middle East. Homer called it "liquid gold." In ancient Greece, athletes ritually rubbed it all over their bodies. Olive oil has been more than mere food to the peoples of the Mediterranean: it has been medicinal, a source of fascination and the fountain of great wealth and power. Later, the Romans refined olive oil extraction and improved cultivars used for oil.

California began its journey into the industry in 1769 at a Franciscan mission in San Diego—thus, the name "mission olives." The California, Manzanillo and Sevillano (Queen) constitute about 90 percent of olive production in this state, with small amounts of Mission, Ascolano and others.

Manzanillo is by far the major cultivar, having a small fruit that lends itself to the black ripe market, but with high enough oil content (>20 percent) that culls can be used for making olive oil. Sevillano is two to three times the size of Manzanillo but has low oil content and is used only as a table olive. Both were introduced from Spain in the late 1800s. Mission was formerly the most popular cultivar in California, but small fruit size, a relatively large stone, and susceptibility to diseases and late frost led to its decline in popularity.

The Arbequina is a tiny green olive from the Catalonia region of Spain. We found it at Olio Nuevo farm in Paso Robles where Art and

Lynn Kishiyama planted 3,700 trees in 2003, soon after they arrived to make the Central Coast their home, bringing with them a desire to plant and produce extra-virgin olive oil on 19 acres of rolling hills.

Practicing the sustainability that he preaches, Kishiyama pointed out the solar panels on his roof and the drip irrigation. "We have an abundance of high-quality water and use only organic fertilizer and organic pesticides on our trees. We shred rather than burn all pruning and do not till to minimize wind erosion."

Pointing out the curve of the hill, Kishiyama talked with gentle love of the land how the location of the trees receives the sunlight as it comes up and over their acreage.

"The trees are planted on a high-density, 8-by-14 foot grid. All fruit is hand picked, and crews work by the hour taking time for careful removal of the fruit to minimize bruising. The Spanish varieties, Arbequina, Manzanillo and the Mission are delicate, less butter and less intense."

In the Olio Nuevo facility, different size "fustis" hold 450 gallons of gold liquid. The fusti is the stainless container used for farm products such as wine, milk and olive oil. They look something like milk cans with handles on the top, a large screw lid and are highly polished.

In three small tasting cups, Kishiyama poured and explained the nose, the taste and the finish of each of his three products. "The 2007 Extra Virgin release is 100 percent Arbequina. It is produced from dominantly green arbequina fruit to capture a fresh grassy taste with a distinctive peppery finish. Olio Nuevo compliments rather than overpowers the foods."

I held the good-size sip in my mouth for the taste and slowly let the oil glide down my throat. With each sip, you begin to notice the difference and meaning of freshness in olive oils.



"The 2008 arbequina is more fruity, more flavorful and peppery with more intensity than the 2007. The nose is referred to as fruitiness, the taste is the bitterness, and the pepper finish is the pungency. How these three characteristics work together is referred to as balance and harmony," Kishiyama said. "The 2008 Arbequina Blend is a combination of relatively ripe Arbequina, Mission and Manzanillo fruit."

The *2008 Olive Festival Guide* details the judging of an extra-virgin olive oil. "Aroma, taste, color, body and peppery finish. Any one of these can affect the quality of the oil."

Is the aroma natural, "green?" Aroma should never be processed and harsh. Other edible oils are often refined with high heat and pressure filtered. This becomes apparent in the oil's smell—oily, processed and manufactured—in other words, unpleasant. Look for a fresh and natural aroma, reminiscent of the lush green hills and fertile soil where the oil's olives are grown.

Is the taste natural, alive? Is there a peppery finish? Taste should never be fatty, oily, stale or lingering. Fresh, quality olives produce a "green" taste—almond-like, with a momen-



tary, distinct peppery finish. A quality extra-virgin olive oil will reflect this balanced taste.

Kishiyama mills his oil nearby at Foxdale Farm where custom olive oil is pressed within hours of picking. "We hand-pick our olives and underload our bins to minimize bruising. All fruit is milled within hours of picking to mitigate oxidation.

"Extra Virgin is the best oil for you. You should be particular about what you put in your body," Kishiyama states. "The oil must be less than .5 percent acidity, mechanically extracted (no heat or solvents) and be defect-free. This last is determined by the judging panel."

Olio Nuevo is certified by the California Olive Oil Council, 100 percent Estate Grown using sustainable methods and, Kishiyama adds, "is exceptionally high in anti-oxidants for good health."

Back at the Olio Nuevo facility, bottles are filled, corked and sealed. Then, they are labeled and decorated by disadvantaged adults whom Kishiyama

hires from NCI Affiliates of Paso Robles, a community training, education and employment service. This is another aspect of sustainable agriculture—sustaining the community.

"Olio nuevo" means new oil and refers to the first bottling of a new harvest. Kishiyama said that to some people it seemed odd that he would choose "Olio Nuevo" as his brand name. "But, when you think of Nouveau Beaujolais of French wine and the excitement when the new wine is bottled and shipped, Olio Nuevo brings that same tradition to the oil."

With the vastness and growth of the olive oil industry in San Luis Obispo County, we will have a second article in our November magazine about the olive oil mills and other members of Farm Bureau who have chosen to bring this fulfilling occupation to fruition.

## Photos

Far left – Arbequina Spanish olive grove at Olio Nuevo farm.

Lower left – Stainless fusti holds olive oil. Inset shows the solar panels at Olio Nuevo.

Above – Art Kishiyama conducts a tasting of three oils.

