



### Welcome back, dear olive oil loving friends!

Times are uncertain all over and our poor, battered Boot, alas, is no exception. But we'll rise to the occasion, as Italians have always done in the past, and bounce back with all our hallmark ingenuity, brilliance and flair. Talking of which, magic is in the air. Quite right, it's that time of the year again – the new **Pornanino Cold Pressed Extra Virgin Olive Oil is coming!** Most of us are being forced to cut back our budgets to some extent, or at least reconsider our spending habits. Whatever you do, please **keep choosing olive oil**, as it's key to a **longer, healthier**

life. It's the one investment that will always pay! So get your yearly supply now, before it runs out!



**Pornanino's olive grove diary** // It's Autumn once again. We are sure you don't need to be reminded that it's time to order the new oil. You have been coming back year after year, for a very long time now, ever ... ▶▶



**I love olive oil so much I'd bathe in it!** // What a great idea. Don't just eat it; let the olives work their magic all over you - inside and out. Yep, that's right. Olive oil is wonderful for the skin ... ▶▶



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Search "Pornanino" or put our Coordinates: N 43° 27.226', E 11° 20.658'

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## Pornanino's olive grove diary

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It's Autumn once again. We are sure you don't need to be reminded that it's time to order the new oil. You have been coming back year after year, for a very long time now, ever loyal to some of the best olive oil on the market.



Weather forecasters have been trying to scare us all year, with dire predictions of drought and unprecedented summer heat more befitting of our African neighbours. We rather believed them, having enjoyed a blissfully mild winter and a stubbornly cloudless spring that made the usually foggy northern regions feel like Saint Tropez. Nature all over Italy refused to go to sleep as if they were afraid of missing some of the action – there were reports of wild animals that couldn't hibernate because of the warmth, and of deciduous plants that sprouted new leaves even before the old ones had been shed. And flowers bloomed a good couple of months ahead of time! Nothing good would come of such an unnatural state of things, that's for sure.

You know how sometimes things seem too good to be true. Wouldn't you wish all winters were balmy and ice-free? Well, in the end the doom-sayers were proved wrong. We enjoyed a very pleasant, although admittedly dry, spring followed by a rather fresh May and June. And, barring a few days of truly African heat, this past summer won't go down in the records for any particular reason. It was the usual mixed bag of sunshine and thunderstorms, long lazy afternoons and freshly laundered dawns. Weatherwise this wasn't a very challenging year for Matteo, although this is something that's easy to say in retrospect but not as obvious when everyone around is talking of coming disasters.

It must be said that Matteo's philosophy of letting nature follow its course is wise in several ways, not the least of them being that it's soothing to the nerves (particularly when everything is going well after all). But in some dark corner of every farmer's mind lurks the ghost of the ancestral fear that disaster sooner or later is going to strike.

You know that olive trees are hardy, as plants born in the rocky, dry soils of the Mediterranean shores are bound to be. They don't mind drought too much and the only thing they really fear is a sharp frost – that would be fatal. At this time of year the real enemy is autumn, should it come shrouded in rain and damp. The olives Matteo has been cosseting all year long need gentle sunshine to ripen slowly to just the perfect stage, neither too soft and oily nor still bitter-tasting and raw. Too much rain would spoil everything at this time, as Matteo would have to make a difficult decision: harvest sooner to avoid mould, or risk waiting until the perfect degree of ripeness (or under-ripeness) is achieved.

Is that really so important, you might well ask. You bet it is. We want your new oil to be just as good as it could possibly be. Even better than last year's. We want it to be the best you can have. So keep your fingers crossed, as Matteo is doing while he patrols his olive groves. Picture him reciting his favourite maxim "perfect oil comes from perfect olives" as he delicately prods the plump fruit to gauge their quality.

Picture Matteo among his beloved trees, looking up at the sky. It's been such a good season so far, why should it act up now? You'll have the best olive oil you've ever had. Trust Matteo. You'll have the best. ♦

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## I love olive oil so much I'd bathe in it!

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What a great idea. Don't just eat it; let the olives work their magic all over you - inside and out. Yep, that's right. Olive oil is wonderful for the skin.



Our skin is protected by a very thin layer called acid mantle, which is composed of the salts contained in sweat and by the lipids (i.e. fat) produced by sebaceous glands. Since it's mildly acidic, it acts to protect the skin from outside aggression by bacteria and fungi but its main function is to retain moisture. When the acid mantle is damaged, our skin is more exposed to infection and, as it loses water, looks wrinkled and dry. Perhaps you've noticed that people on a low-fat diet tend to have thin hair and a sagging skin. That's because water is naturally stored in lipids, so you can't have one without the other, and water is what makes our skin firm and elastic. Our body needs fatty acids in order to function, and the skin is no exception.

By composition olive oil is nearly identical to the natural lipids that protect the skin, down to the mildly acidic PH. Therefore it reinforces and rebuilds the acid mantle, and since it's easily absorbed it also helps build up the skin's stores of lipids and water, so it both nourishes and moisturizes. But that's not all. Olive oil contains soothing elements that ease irritations, and it's particularly rich in vitamins and other compounds that counteract oxidation, a natural process in which free radicals are released that damage the cells, leading to premature aging. So you see that bathing in olive oil is actually quite a good idea - if you don't mind the oiliness, that is.

The ancients knew all about the amazing properties of olive oil, and used them to their advantage in many ways, including beauty. The very first soap we know about was made with olive oil, in Babylon some 5,000 years ago, and the tradition survived along the centuries until the early 1900s, when industrial production began in earnest and the old ways were discarded. This is actually a pity, because mass-produced detergents are not nearly as friendly to our skin.

We, on the other hand, love to do things the old way and just hate to see the wisdom of our forefathers going to waste. So we have scouted Italy to find someone who could offer us all the advantages of modern research applied to the recipes of old and have come up with an olive oil soap based on the very same top quality first cold pressed extra virgin olive oil we bottle for food consumption. It's professionally hand-made the traditional way, and so incredibly mild that it can even be used for baby care.

Of course you don't have to buy our hand-made soap in order to enjoy the wonderful properties of olive oil. Just try rubbing some Pornanino cold-pressed extra virgin olive oil all over your body straight from the bottle, as the Greek athletes and the ancient Romans used to do. It really works! ♦

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## Olives, olives everywhere! And not a Martini in sight ...

We all share a healthy love for olive oil, but have we ever spared a thought for the innocent fruit that gets squeezed to a pulp in the process? Here's to little olive, with many thanks for the wonderful bruschettas (and Martinis) it's selflessly given us.

Let's get rid of the boring facts first. Technically the fruit of the olive tree is called a drupe, meaning that the pit contains one or two seeds, which puts it in the same league as peaches and plums. Unlike them, though, the main reason why something more than 800 million olive trees are grown world-wide is not their sweet taste, but rather their oil content.



Altogether from 20 to 30% of an olive is made up of oil, which is distributed all over: 1% in the skin, 70% in the flesh and 29% in the pit. In Italy alone over 470 different varieties are grown, but around the Mediterranean there are reckoned to be thousands. Although yield, oil content, shape and size vary wildly, there are two characters that never change, no matter what. Each and every olive starts life green-colored and turns to brown or black as it matures. And they all taste vile. Cultivation of the olive is as old as the civilizations that blossomed around the Mediterranean, and it does tell us something about

the stubbornness (or astonishing vision) of our forebears that they bothered to find ways to put the unassuming, bitter-tasting olive to such wonderful use. Take it from us: you wouldn't want to be the first person who picked it straight from the tree and popped it in his mouth.

Yet people in Crete were eating olives as early as 3,500 years before Christ, having mastered the technique to get rid of the chemicals that confer them the bitter taste. By 1000 BC olives had reached Egypt and thanks to the Phoenicians had spread around the Mediterranean. Around 600 BC the Romans possessed a merchant marine and a stock market just for the oil trade. And the rest, as they say, is history. Thankfully the good folk of Crete did a thorough job. If they had just focused on getting the oil out we would have missed the garnish for our Martinis! Actually, the market for table olives is quite big worldwide, although of course not as big as that for olive oil. Olives have been a staple of Mediterranean cuisine for millennia.

When they are meant to be eaten, olives can be picked at different stages and this is the reason why they come in different colors – green olives have been harvested when still unripe, whereas black ones are allowed to mature on the tree. And the same goes for all the shades in between. Once picked, table olives have to be cured. This can be done by steeping them in a lye solution, traditionally wood ash, to get rid of the bitter taste and soften the flesh (most important in green, unripe ones); or in salt brine. Using lye is quicker, just 24 hours instead of several weeks, but purists maintain that it spoils the flavor, the texture and the color of the olives. Mission olives, for instance, are actually green olives turned black by lye curing and oxygenation (i.e. industrial processing). Ripe, black ones can also be dry-cured, which makes them characteristically shrivelled.

Cured olives then go back to pickle in salt brine, olive oil or a vinegar solution, sometimes with the addition of herbs and spices. The larger are often stuffed with hot peppers or sweet mignon onions, but we frankly prefer them plain so we can fully appreciate their characteristic flavor. If you are lucky enough to find a good selection of naturally cured ones, do try as many varieties as you can. You'll see how astonishingly different they taste. And you'll understand why their gift of olive oil is such a wonderful masterpiece. ♦

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## Grandma Lia's olive oil recipes

By almost universal consent, though, lasagne belong to the traditional cuisine of Emilia-Romagna, a northern Italian region famous all over the world for such delicacies as Parma ham, Parmesan cheese, meat-filled tortellini and a host of other wickedly rich and luscious dishes. Of course since Emilia is a gourmet's paradise, everyone used to have their own idea of how perfect lasagne should be and their own secret recipe for the most important part of the dish – the meat sauce Italians call ragù. Here's our family recipe – enjoy it!

### Lasagne (serves 6)

- 6-9 ready-made egg pasta squares (lasagne) depending on size
- 1 ¼ pint milk
- 2 oz butter
- 2 tablespoons flour
- Grated nutmeg
- 1 small carrot, finely chopped
- 1 celery stick (roughly double the weight of the carrot), finely chopped
- 1 medium-sized onion, finely chopped
- 2 bay leaves
- 11 oz ground meat
- 5 oz fresh sausage (salsiccia)
- ½ cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 1 tablespoon tomato purée
- A few dried porcini mushrooms (optional)
- 2 oz dry white wine
- Salt and freshly ground pepper

Soak the dried porcini mushrooms in a little warm water, if using. Finely chop the carrot, celery and onion and cook them in a saucepan with a little butter and Parnanino Extra Virgin Olive Oil over a slow heat until soft and translucent. Add the bay leaves, ground meat and mashed sausage (remove the skin first), turn up the heat and cook for a few minutes, stirring with a wooden spoon to prevent it from sticking. When the meat is no longer pink and raw-looking douse with the wine, add the tomato purée, chopped mushrooms (if using) together with their soaking liquid, a pinch of salt and a little freshly-ground pepper. Cover with a lid and cook over a very slow heat for 3 hours, adding a little water or stock if it looks like sticking. Don't add too much and only if needed. Adjust the seasoning if needed and put aside. It will keep for a few days in the fridge. It freezes quite well.

Make the white sauce: melt the butter in a saucepan, add the flour and cook for a couple of minutes, stirring all the time. Remove from the heat, add a little milk and stir vigorously. When the mix is smooth pour in the rest of the milk and cook for about ten minutes. Season with salt, freshly ground pepper and some grated nutmeg. When it's cooked remove from the heat and add two tablespoons of grated Parmesan cheese. Stir to dissolve.



Scald the lasagne squares in plenty of boiling water if necessary (read manufacturer's instructions). Cover the bottom of a well greased baking tin with a layer of lasagne squares. Cover with ragù, sprinkle with grated Parmesan cheese and spread enough white sauce to cover. Add another layer of lasagne squares, ragù, Parmesan cheese and white sauce. Finish off with one final layer of lasagne squares, the last of the white sauce, a generous sprinkling of Parmesan cheese and a few dots of butter. Bake in a moderately hot oven (375°F) until golden on top, about 40 minutes.

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Tell us if you like our recipes! Is there a recipe you'd like Grandma Lia to work out for you? [Let us know](#)