

The Olive Tree, "the tree that feeds the children" according to Sophocles

Nothing is more characteristic of Greece than the millions of olive trees that grow in valleys and mountainous areas. Olive oil is more than one of the leading agricultural products of Greece.

The Olive Tree, "the tree that feeds the children" according to Sophocles, is the protagonist of the Greek nature and history as olive oil is the protagonist of the Greek diet.

The indigenous olive tree (wild olive tree) first appeared in the eastern Mediterranean but it was in Greece that it was first cultivated. Since then, the presence of the olive tree in the Greek region has been uninterrupted and closely connected with the traditions and the culture of the Greek people.

Its systematic cultivation started in the pre-historic times - the Stone and Bronze Age and ever since, it has been a vital element of the economy across the civilisations which flourished in Greece.

Greek Olive oil is a precious gift Greek land has to offer to the world!

The Greek olive oil is the basis of the Mediterranean Diet as it is considered to be the healthiest product of the Mother Nature.

Greece produces more than 430,000 tons of olive oil annually, and more than 75% of that is Extra virgin olive oil, which is the best type of olive oil.

The Greek olive oil is exported throughout the world.

Cretan cuisine

In the Cretan kitchen olive oil plays a dominating role. There is practically no dish, which is not served with olive oil. Even today in daily life Cretans prefer a vegetarian diet with beans and other pulses, greens, vegetables and grains, cheese, pasta and potatoes. Meat dishes are



reserved for special events, when they host guests or go out for dinner together with friends and family.

Salads are drowned in olive oil, so are fresh feta cheese and vegetables. Dipping bread into the juicy mixture of oil and tomato juice at the bottom of the salad bowl is a delicacy no one should miss when visiting Crete.

Health

There is increasing scientific evidence that there are positive health effects from diets which are high in fruits, vegetables, legumes, and whole grains, and which include fish, nuts and low-fat dairy products. Such diets need not be restricted in total fat as long as there is not an excess of calories, and emphasize predominantly vegetable oils that are low in saturated fats and partially-hydrogenated oils. The traditional Mediterranean Diet, whose principal source of fat is olive oil, encompasses these dietary characteristics.

The term traditional "Mediterranean diet" has a specific meaning. It reflects food patterns typical of some Mediterranean regions in the early 1960's, such as Crete, parts of the rest of



Greece, and southern Italy.

Characteristics:

- an abundance of plant food (fruit, vegetables, breads, other forms of cereals, potatoes, beans, nuts, and seeds);

- minimally processed, seasonally fresh, and locally grown foods;

- fresh fruit as the typical daily dessert, with sweets containing concentrated sugars or honey consumed a few times per week;

- olive oil as the principal source of fat;

- dairy products (principally cheese and yogurt) consumed daily in low to moderate amounts;

- fish and poultry consumed in low to moderate amounts;

- zero to four eggs consumed weekly;

- red meat consumed in low amounts; and

- wine consumed in low to moderate amounts, normally with meals.

As much as can be determined, this diet was low in saturated fat (less than or equal to 7-8% of energy), with total fat ranging from less than 25% to more than 35% of energy from one area to another. Data also indicate that work in the field or kitchen resulted in a lifestyle that included regular physical activity and was associated with far less obesity than was observed in the United States.

OLIVES IN THE TRADITIONAL GREEK KITCHEN

For all its illustrious history and nutritional value, the olive is used sparingly in traditional Greek cooking.

Olives appear in a whole array of salads. They are delicious matched with all sorts of vegetables, such as fresh ripe tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, onions and more. They are wonderful

with vegetables preserved in brine or olive oil. Greeks use olives in some sauces, namely tomato-based sauces that are served over pasta or with meats, poultry, and fish.

There are several breads and pies which call for olives. In some parts of the country, stews often include olives. One such dish comes from the Ionian island of Zakynthos, where potatoes are stewed with onions, tomatoes, and black olives.

Another traditional dish calls for chicken stewed with green olives and feta. On

the mainland, olives are roasted and served as a meze, and in Crete, one of the most delicious preparations is often elies— roasted olives.

In the last few years, the olive has caught the imagination of contemporary chefs, so that even in the contemporary Greek kitchen olives are everywhere: In the skillet and in the pan, in breads, pies, braised dishes, sauces, stuffings, dips, and more. One interesting evolution harkens back to the sweet-savory flavor combinations of antiquity:

Olives matched with dried figs and herbs seem to be a combination growing in popularity, in stuffed poultry dishes, in breads, and as a dip or condiment.

Legend

Greek mythology reveals the "true" origins of the olive tree:

Challenged by Zeus to present a gift to the citizens of Attica, Athena and Poseidon faced-off in an immortal showdown. While a swat of Poseidon's trident produced salt water from a stone, Athena countered with a strike of her spear on the holy rock of the Acropolis.

And the first olive tree was born. Charmed by her ingenuity and generous offering, the citizens of Attica renamed their city Athens in honour of the goddess. This gift to the people of Athens may be myth, but its spirit lives on in our name and legendary olive oil.

Data About the Olive Tree and Greece

Many people claim that the oldest olive tree, 5,000 years old, is in Pano Vouves, in Kolymvari, Chania. The average life expectancy of an olive tree is 300-600 years.

The cultivation and exploitation technique today is not very different from the one used in ancient times

The Mediterranean area produces 99% of the world olive oil production

Greece, despite the fact that it is a small country in magnitude, stands in the 3rd position in the world in the olive oil production, after Spain and Italy

There are today approximately 120,000,000 olive trees in Greece (the population of the country is approximately 10,000,000) covering an area of approximately 6 million stremmata (1 stremma= 1000 m² / about 0 of an acre). Approximately 450,000 Greek families are involved in the cultivation of the olive tree and the processing of its fruit all over the country

The prefectures of Heraklion and Messinia are in the first position in the production of olive oil in Greece

Greece is the biggest exporter of Extra Pure Olive Oil considered the best quality of olive oil

The Greeks are today the first consumers of olive oil compared to any other people and the per capita consumption is approximately 16 kilos annually. In Crete, consumption comes up to 30 kilos per year per person. Scientific research has proven that the Cretan diet is the healthiest in the world

Biological cultivation of the olive tree in Greece started approximately 10 years ago in Mani and it is estimated that today it uses 15,000 stremmata while it is expected to exceed 35,000 stremmata in the next years.

