

Savor the Flavor: Cooking with Oils and Vinegars

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Oils and vinegars are perfect for adding great flavor and health benefits to any dish. There are many different types of oils and vinegars to cook with that can be both flavorful and healthy. Oils are known for their anti-inflammatory, anti-bacterial and antioxidant properties. Vinegars have been used for centuries for their “healing” properties because of the antioxidants that they contain as well. Knowing what types to use for different dishes is the best way to get started in adding more flavor to your meals.

Oils

There are many different types of oils used in cooking. Each has different properties, tastes, and uses in the kitchen. Some are more expensive than others and have a healthier profile. Each oil has different levels of unsaturated and saturated fats that affect each oil’s health benefits overall. Oils with higher levels of unsaturated fats, such as monounsaturated or polyunsaturated fats, are



considered healthier choices. In this publication, we will discuss olive oil, canola oil, vegetable oil, peanut oil, and coconut oil and the best uses for each (Table 1).

Olive Oil

Olive oil is a common cooking oil that has many health benefits. Many have started using olive oil in place of margarine and butter. Olive oil is a great addition to any meal because of its robust flavor. There are different types of olive oils such as virgin and extra-virgin olive oils. As the name sug-

gests, virgin and extra-virgin olive oils undergo minimal processing and have the strongest flavor. These may be the most expensive on the shelf. If used for cooking, they should be used at very low temperatures. These oils are used best in scenarios where the flavor of the oil can come through, such as salad dressings, drizzlings, marinades, or added at the end of food preparation for a burst of flavor.

Olive oils that aren’t virgin or extra virgin are better choice for higher heating purposes. These are great for sautéing or

roasting, but not frying. This may be a more cost-effective option to have on hand at all times.

Not only is the flavor profile of olive oil a great benefit for cooking, but also has a list of health benefits. The Mediterranean diet, which has been considered a gold-standard heart healthy diet, is found to be rich in olive oils. Many research studies confirm that olive oil, rich in monounsaturated fats, are the type of fat that is considered a “good fat” and may reduce the risk of rheumatoid arthritis, diabetes, cancer, and inflammatory bowel disease. Due to all of these health benefits, olive oil has become a desired staple in everyday cooking.

Canola Oil

Canola oil is one of the most commonly used cooking oils found in the American kitchen. It is made of crushed canola seeds and is known for being lower in saturated fat. Canola

oil has a light flavor, making it a very versatile oil that can be paired with just about any dish. Canola oil has a higher smoke point than olive oil, which makes it desirable for cooking at higher temperatures such as frying, sautéing, roasting, baking and grilling. Canola oil may also be used to replace butter or margarine, for preparing salad dressings, sauces and marinades, and for nonstick baking.

Vegetable Oil

Vegetable oil is simply a combination of several plant-based oils. The amount of unsaturated fats differs in vegetable oils because the combination of plant-based oils may be different in one brand from the next. Vegetable oil is very similar to canola oil in that it is a multi-purpose oil and is very affordable because it is typically produced from subsidized crops. Due to its mild flavor, it is commonly used for baking, sautéing, roasting, making marinades and salad dressings.

Vegetable and canola oils don’t have as many healthy fats as olive oil, but are still excellent choices when trying to reduce the amount of saturated fat in the diet. Some health benefits may include reduced risk of cardiovascular disease, insulin sensitivity, cholesterol levels and inflammation. Overall, there are numerous benefits to consuming and cooking with plant-based oils like canola and vegetable oils.

Peanut Oil

Peanut oil requires very high temperatures before it begins to break down, so it is great for cooking methods that use very high heats like stir-frying, deep-frying, or pan-frying. This is the oil typically used in restaurant settings. It is not commonly used in baking or other types of cooking because it may add an unwanted flavor. If trying to increase healthy fats in the diet, this may not be the best option, with fewer monounsaturated fats than vegetable, canola, and olive oils.



Table 1. Oils and their uses.			
Type of Oil	Heat	Uses and Applications	Example
Olive oil	Low	Sautéing, marinades, salad dressings, drizzlings	Mix with Italian herbs and serve with bread for dipping
Canola oil	Moderate	Sautéing, baking, grilling, roasting, marinades, and salad dressings	Lightly coat vegetables prior to roasting
Vegetable oil	Moderate	Sautéing, baking, grilling, roasting, marinades, and salad dressings	Coat your pans for non-stick baking
Peanut oil	High	Stir-frying, deep-frying, pan-frying	Cooking oil for deep-frying whole turkey
Coconut oil	Moderate	Sautéing, baking, frying, roasting, as well as cosmetic uses (skin, hair, lip care)	Apply to chicken prior to roasting in place of butter

Coconut Oil

Coconut oil has recently become popular in cooking. Coconut oil is a byproduct of mature coconuts and has a sweet, slightly nutty taste that gives food a tropical flavor. Coconut oil should actually be called coconut fat because it is solid at room temperature, but has a low melting point of 78 degrees Fahrenheit. Coconut oil has many uses in the kitchen, such as roasting, baking, frying, and sautéing. It can also be used in place of butter or shortening in most baking recipes. It should be kept in a cool place out of sunlight.

Coconut oil is more than 80% saturated fat, much higher than lard or butter, and provides 121 calories per tablespoon. Some people believe the different structured fats in coconut oil make it a healthier option, but evidence is lacking to make this conclusion. Like any saturated fat, coconut oil should be used

occasionally in small amounts. Rather than ingesting, coconut oil may have more cosmetic benefits such as improving skin and hair, alleviating dry skin, or serving as a lip balm.

Although some oils are a healthier option, they are still fats that have calories and a recommended amount of intake each day. According to the USDA's guide to daily food intake, MyPlate, adults should consume 5-7 teaspoons of oil a day. For more information about oil and serving sizes, visit www.choosemyplate.gov.

Flavored Vinegars

Vinegars are easy to use and store in your home, but most importantly, they are the perfect addition to your everyday cooking ingredients that add lots of flavor with few calories. Vinegar's tangy taste comes from the acetic acid that it contains. There are several different types of flavored vin-

egars with very different tastes. Some of the more popular ones you might have heard of are balsamic vinegar, red wine vinegar, and apple cider vinegar (Table 2).

Balsamic Vinegar

There are three different grades of balsamic vinegar: traditional, commercial and condiment balsamic vinegar. Traditional balsamic vinegar is aged for a minimum of 12 years and comes from only two regions in Italy, Modena and Emilia. It is an expensive product. Condiment and commercial grade balsamic vinegars will not be as high quality as traditional, but are more affordable and quite suitable for general use as an ingredient.

Balsamic vinegar is most often used as a flavoring in salad dressings, vegetables and meat dishes. It may be drizzled over salad greens or roasted vegetables to add a woody, sweet,

tart flavor. It also pairs well with chicken, pork, and many fruits. Not only is balsamic vinegar great for cooking, but there are potential health benefits to consuming this product as well. Balsamic vinegar contains antioxidants that may help reduce the risk for illnesses and chronic diseases, yet more research is needed. Adding balsamic vinegar in your cooking can be an easy and quick way to get antioxidants in your everyday diet.

Red Wine Vinegar

As the name implies, red wine vinegar production starts with red wine that may be aged up to two years. Higher quality wines produce superior vinegars and may be aged longer. The vibrant burgundy color and tart flavor make a distinctive contribution to marinades, salad dressings, and pickling brine. Some red wine vinegars may be more expensive because they are made from a single wine source and are aged for



longer periods of time. Red wine vinegar is best paired with heartier foods such as beef, pork and vegetables. It can also be used for dressings and salads.

Use a ratio of one-quarter cup red wine vinegar to one-half cup olive oil with herbs and spices for a traditional red wine vinaigrette salad dressing.

Table 2. Vinegars and their uses.			
Type of Vinegar	Pairs with	Uses and Applications	Example
Balsamic vinegar	Roasted vegetables, meat including chicken and pork, fruits such as peaches and berries	Salad dressings, sauces, drizzlings	Roast vegetables and toss with vinegar prior to serving
Red wine vinegar	Heartier foods such as beef, pork and root vegetables such as carrots and potatoes	Salad dressings, soups, sauces, marinades, pickling	Dash in pan toward end of sautéing vegetables to balance flavors
Apple cider vinegar	Fruits, vegetables, chicken, pork	Salad dressings, soups, sauces, marinades, pickling	Toss with shredded cabbage and apples to make a slaw

Red wine vinegar, as with balsamic vinegar, is well known for its antioxidant and phenolic properties. Although research is lacking in showing the direct health benefits of consuming these vinegars, they are low in calories, fat and sodium which make them ideal for healthy cooking at home.

Apple Cider Vinegar

Apple cider vinegar is a product of fermentation when sugars from apples are broken down by bacteria and yeast. It has a tangy, slight apple flavor that brings a lot of taste with only adding a little bit of vinegar. Apple cider vinegar can be used in many different recipes. It can be used for salad dressings, marinades, sauces, soups, added to hot drinks such as teas and even cold drinks, like smoothies.

As of recently, apple cider vinegar has been brought to light as a health supplement. Weight loss claims from consuming apple cider vinegar can be found on the internet, but no human studies have shown this to be true. Some sources may encourage consuming plain apple cider vinegar to curb hunger; however, ingesting vinegar plain could damage tooth enamel and irritate the throat and stomach. Supplements are also available, but no research

supports their claims. The best utilization of apple cider vinegar lies in the robust flavor it can add to foods and beverages while reducing the need for other high-calorie condiments or ingredients.

After looking at these different oils and vinegars, it is easy to see that many of them have very similar properties and health benefits. It is important to use ingredients in moderation, but it can truly be as simple as drizzling some oil or vinegar over vegetables or a salad, or even cooking your chicken in olive oil instead of margarine. Knowing how these ingredients work will have you preparing more foods at home in no time. Find a fun recipe and give them a try!

References

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Basic Vinaigrette

Servings: 5

Serving Size: approximately 2 tablespoons

Ingredients:

- 4 tablespoons vinegar (cider, balsamic, red wine, etc.)
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon pepper
- ¼ teaspoon mustard (yellow, Dijon, brown etc.)
- 6 tablespoons vegetable oil (olive, canola, etc.)

Directions:

- Combine vinegar, salt, pepper and mustard in a mixing bowl with a whisk. Gradually add oil while mixing. Store covered in the refrigerator and stir before serving.

Variations:

Sweet Vinaigrette (Basic vinaigrette plus the following):

- ¼ teaspoon sugar or honey

Italian Vinaigrette (Basic vinaigrette plus the following):

- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon Italian seasoning
- 1 pinch crushed red pepper flakes

Honey Mustard Vinaigrette (Basic vinaigrette plus the following):

- 1 teaspoon Dijon or spicy mustard
- 2 teaspoons honey

Nutrition Information (basic vinaigrette): 148 calories, 16g fat, 2g saturated fat, 123mg sodium, 0g carbohydrates, 0g sugar

Recipe adapted from What's Cooking? USDA Mixing Bowl.