

# Living from the Heart

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## All About Cooking Oils

### Inside this issue:

All About Cooking Oils 1-3

Gotta Love the Label 3-4

Treating Your Body Like a Computer 4-5

Blueberry Pancake Recipe 9

From bland to bold, cooking oils come in a myriad of flavors and hues, and their personalities may be akin to their color—but not always! Find out which oils deserve center stage and which play a bit part.



The most common misconception about oils is that they are interchangeable. Not so; every oil reacts to heat differently, which is the factor that determines how to cook with it—or whether you should cook with it at all. So when a recipe says use sesame, peanut or chili oil, it's best not to substitute if you want the desired results.

The first thing to consider when choosing a cooking oil is what you are using it for. To sauté? To add flavor? To cook healthy meals? Will the oil be hot or cold? These questions will help you determine whether you need a “bit-player” or a “star” cooking oil for the dish you're making.

### Bit-Player Oils

- Vegetable oil
- Corn oil
- Safflower oil
- Sunflower oil
- Peanut oil
- Coconut oil
- Canola oil

### Star Cooking Oils

- Sesame oil
- Almond oil
- Avocado oil
- Grapeseed oil
- Olive oil

### *Bit-Player Oils*

Bit-player oils are the ones that pave the way for your great recipes. They're perfect for cooking or frying because they can handle high heat, and they don't impose on or overpower the flavor of the food itself. Reasonably inexpensive, they're relatively flavorless too—which is why they're not a great choice for salad dressings or sauces but are an ideal butter substitute in cakes, breads and other baked goods, making them incredibly moist!

- **Vegetable oil:** A blend of several different plant, nut and seed oils (often primarily soybean), this can take high heat.
- **Corn oil:** Yes, corn is a vegetable but it's also a starch, so it gets a category of its own. One of the most commonly used, corn oil is high in polyunsaturated fat, but it can foam and smoke if it gets too hot.
- **Safflower oil:** Colorless, made from safflower seeds and good for salad dressings (not because of its flavor but because you can refrigerate it), this doesn't solidify when chilled. Great for deep frying because of its high smoking point.

- **Sunflower oil:** This is a useful all-purpose oil, although some people find its flavor too strong for baked goods and salads. It's low in saturated fat and high in polyunsaturated fat, and because it stores well, it's highly resistant to rancidity.
- **Peanut oil:** Extracted from steamed peanuts, this oil has a smoking point that's slightly lower than corn or safflower oil and, therefore, best used for frying chicken.
- **Coconut oil:** This tasty oil has been experiencing a renaissance. Once considered fattening, it's now thought to have health benefits (the virgin version pressed from fresh coconut, that is). Use it for curry dishes and for frying.
- **Canola oil:** Extracted from conventionally-bred variants of the rapeseed plant, canola oil is lower in saturated fat than any other oil. Its neutral flavor and relatively high smoking point make it a good all-purpose oil.

### "Star" Cooking Oils

A "star" oil—one with a distinct flavor that calls attention to itself—is a noteworthy ingredient in a recipe. Nut oils often fall into this category because of their delicate flavor (which heating can diffuse); they can be used when cooking or baking, but are best suited for appropriate recipes, e.g., using walnut or hazelnut oil in banana bread.

- **Sesame oil:** This oil is thick, aromatic and highly flavorful, especially the dark or toasted version. Prevalent in Chinese and Indian cooking, it has a rich, smoky taste that can make for a delicious surprise in conventional sauces, dips and spreads.
- **Almond oil and avocado oil:** These both have distinctive flavors—sweetly nutty—but they also tolerate high heat, which makes them good for cooking and frying.
- **Grapeseed oil:** It has the highest smoking point so it's the best to cook with (although it can be expensive). A by-product of winemak-

ing, grapeseed oil is also slightly nutty—which makes it a good base for salad dressing or infused oils plus stir-fries and fondue.

- **Olive oil:** Practically in a class by itself, olive oil is considered the Cadillac of oils for reasons ranging from culinary to cosmetic. (Sophia Loren purportedly credits the abundance of olive oil in Italian food for her ageless, radiant complexion.) Extracted from tree-ripened olives, it's flavorful and considered one of the "good-for-you" fats, mainly because of its antioxidant properties and oleic acid (a monounsaturated fat, which translates as heart healthy).

Regular olive oil (or 100 percent pure olive oil), is usually a deep gold and has higher acidity and less flavor than "virgin" olive oil—but it's the best for cooking since it can withstand higher heat. By the way, "light" olive oil means only the color is lighter—it has just as many calories (120 in a tablespoon) as regular olive oil.

What's "virgin" or "extra virgin" olive oil? According to the International Olive Oil Council, headquartered in Spain, "virgin" oil is cold pressed, uncooked and untreated. In the U.S., "virgin" refers to oil that comes from the first pressing of the olives, without further processing. "Extra virgin" is simply "virgin" olive oil with low acidity (below one percent). When first pressed, these oils are deep green, but the color fades with time.

Source: SC Johnson's Right at Home web site  
<http://www.rightathome.com>



## So, What's the Smoking Point?

It's the temperature at which oil starts to scorch in the skillet. Home cooks should have at least a general idea of which oils have high smoking points and low smoking points to avoid ending up with a burned flavor. And no walking out of the kitchen to change the channel. Remember that oil can easily burst into flames if it gets too hot!

### Helpful Tips About Cooking Oils

- Did you know that ALL olives start out green and turn to black?
- Store cooking oils in a cool, dark place. Refrigeration is recommended (with corks or lids tightly sealed so odors won't be absorbed). Just remember to bring oil to room temperature before using.
- Pouring cooking oil into the kitchen sink can cause pipes to clog. Instead, place cooled oil in a sealed container and discard with your regular garbage.



## Gotta Love the Label

Even though we have talked about the Nutrition Facts Label before in previous newsletters, it never hurts to have a refresher. You may think that lately grocery stores seem a whole lot more like libraries these days. But instead of picking up a good book, shoppers are reading nutrition labels—and with good reason.

By checking out the label before you buy, you can find lower-fat and higher-fiber foods that can help you eat healthier. Here is a brief inside guide to reading the Nutrition Facts Label:



**Serving Size** The first line defines what makes up one serving of the food by weight (grams) or measure (1/2 cup). When comparing choices, be sure the serving size is the same for a fair comparison of calories and nutrients.

**Servings per Container** The second line tells the number of servings found in the container. Most

packages contain more than one serving.

**Amount per Serving** The next set of information is spelled out based on the serving size declared above.

**Calories** The calories on the label are based on the amount in one serving—but most packages contain multiple servings. To figure out the total calories in the package, you'll need to do some math. For example, a 3-oz bag of chips may contain three servings at 160 calories each—which means 480 calories for the entire bag.

**Calories from Fat** Nutrition labels list the number of calories contributed by the fat in the food. Fat provides more calories per amount than carbohydrate or protein—and its consumption may be linked to disease—so be sure to balance high-fat foods with foods that contain lower amounts of fat.

***Fat and Cholesterol*** The label shows the amount of fat present in the food. Because there are different kinds of fat, the label lists amounts of saturated, trans, polyunsaturated, and monounsaturated fats, followed by the amount of cholesterol.

***Fiber*** Fiber is part of the carbohydrate present in foods. Look for foods that are rich in fiber—those containing 5 grams of fiber or more per serving or good sources at 3 g of fiber per serving.

***Percent Daily Value (%DV)*** The % Daily Value (%DV) listed next to various nutrients is based on a 2,000-calorie diet. Look for foods with smaller amounts of fat, saturated fat, and sodium. And choose options with higher percentages of fiber, vitamins, and minerals.

***Vitamins and Minerals*** Amounts of vitamin A, vitamin C, calcium, and iron are listed as %DV on nutrition labels—but other nutrients may be listed too, if they are present. Nutrients with 10%DV are good sources while 20%DV or more indicates an excellent source.

***Ingredients*** Ingredients are listed by weight. The ingredient with the greatest weight is shown first; the ingredient with the smallest weight is listed last. If you're looking for whole grains, choose foods with "whole" before the grain, as in whole wheat or whole oats, as the first or second ingredient.

***Allergen Warning*** As allergy concerns increase, so has allergen information on packaging. Good news: A 2006 FDA rule mandates that foods contain warnings (below the ingredient list) for the presence of potential allergens (milk, tree nuts, peanuts, soy, wheat, egg, shellfish, or fish).

Source:

*Food and Drug Administration and Eat Better America*

## Treating Your Body Like a Computer

If your body was a computer, would it be receiving lots of "error" messages? Is it beginning to run slower and take longer to "start?" Here's a checklist to help optimize your performance and prevent crashing.

### Are you trying to run too many programs at the same time?

If you're operating less efficiently because there are too many activities making demands on your system, shut down some programs. Some examples include:

- If time is tight, rather than make a special company dinner from "scratch," invite people for a pot-luck meal.
- No time to work out AND fix your hair afterwards ... get a new hairstyle or cover your hair with some type of interesting headgear. Who knows ... you might start a whole new product line or trend!

You may actually accomplish more if you don't try to accomplish several things at the same time. Researchers, such as Dr. Earl Miller, Massachusetts Institute of Technology Picower professor of neuroscience, are finding that multi-tasking can be less efficient than doing one task at a time, especially if the tasks are more complex. "Switching from task to task, you think you're actually paying attention to everything around you at the same time. But you're actually not," says Miller.

Consider scheduling tasks for separate times, for example:

- Alternate cooking days with workout days. Cook ahead on cooking days, freeing up time on your workout days.
- Plan a casserole or stew that can cook while you

do yoga or take a walk. If you do multi-task, combine a task that doesn't demand as much input from your system as the other task. Such as: work out on a treadmill while watching TV or listen to music while cooking.

### **Is your anti-virus software up-to-date and running?**

If you're susceptible to every bug that comes around, it's time to check if you're eating right, getting enough sleep, being physically active and reducing stress. The cost and time for "repairs" may be greater than the amount needed for prevention.

### **Is your battery dangerously low?**

Recharge your battery before it loses power completely. Habit #7 in Stephen Covey's *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* is "Sharpen the Saw." Covey tells the story of a woodcutter whose productivity decreased after sawing for several days straight. Each day his saw became duller and duller. Covey advocates a balanced program for self-renewal in these four areas of your life: physical, social/emotional, mental and spiritual. Recharge by eating healthy, getting some physical activity, making meaningful connections with others, stimulating your mind and devoting time to your spiritual renewal through such means as time spent in nature, music, prayer or service.



show under your sweater?

### **Do you need to hit "escape," "undo" or "delete?"**

Your computer offers several options if you change your mind about a decision. Offer yourself that same choice with your life. You may have a reputation for always saying "yes" to a request for help, regardless of how busy you are. The next time, say something such as one of the following examples. It's not necessary to elaborate and give an explanation.

- "I'm sorry but I'm not available that night" or "I have another commitment for that time."
- "I can't help you right now, but I could (in a half hour, next week, next month ...)."
- "I can only help you for an hour, and then I have to leave." Leave after an hour ... even if it's just to go to the bathroom if you're at your office!
- "I can't do that right now, but I could ... (name a less time-consuming task)."

### **Time to reboot**

Now, that you've finished trouble-shooting your personal system, consider making some changes. Then, reboot your body and enjoy the benefits!

*Source: Alice Henneman, MS, RD  
Extension Educator University of Nebraska  
at Lincoln Extension*

### **Are you bogged down by unneeded files and programs?**

Remove anything from your life that isn't needed and slows your overall performance. For example:

- Do you still belong to a club or organization that no longer meets your needs or interests? The time you're giving this activity is taking time from something else. Move on!
- Are you ironing (what's an iron, some of you may say!) the whole shirt when only the collar will





## Blueberry-Pecan Pancakes

You can make these delicious pancakes with either fresh or frozen blueberries.

Prep Time:10 min Start to Finish:30 min Yield:12 servings

1 cup all-purpose flour	1/4cup molasses
1/2cup whole-wheat flour	1cup boiling water
1/2cup oat bran	1cup fat-free vanilla yogurt
1/2cup chopped pecans	2 large eggs
1teaspoon baking soda	1tablespoon canola oil
1/4teaspoon salt	1cup fresh or frozen blueberries

You can make these delicious pancakes with either fresh or frozen blueberries. Prep Time:10 min Start to Finish:30 min Yield:12 servings

- 1.Coat a large nonstick skillet with cooking spray and set over medium heat.
- 2.In a small bowl, combine unbleached or all-purpose flour, whole-wheat flour, oat bran, pecans, baking soda, and salt.
- 3.In a large bowl, combine molasses and water. Stir in yogurt, eggs, and oil. Pour molasses mixture into flour mixture. Mix just until moistened. Gently stir in blueberries. Pour batter by 1/3 cupfuls into the skillet, making a few at a time. Cook 2 to 3 minutes, or until bubbly and edges look dry. Turn and cook 1 minute, or until underside is golden. Serve immediately

### Nutritional Information

1 Serving: Calories 170 (Calories from Fat 50); Total Fat 6g (Saturated Fat 1g, Trans Fat 0g); Cholesterol 35mg; Sodium 180mg; Total Carbohydrate 25g (Dietary Fiber 3g, Sugars 9g); Protein 5g Percent Daily Value\*: Vitamin A 0%; Vitamin C 0%; Calcium 6%; Iron 8% Exchanges: 1 1/2 Starch; 0 Other Carbohydrate; 0 Vegetable; 1 Fat Carbohydrate Choices: 1 1/2

\*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet.



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