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FOOD & WINE

OLIVE OIL'S SWEET SIDE

A favorite savory ingredient moonlights in desserts.

THE FIRST TIME I BAKED SOMETHING SWEET USING OLIVE OIL, it was because I was out of canola oil. The recipe: carrot cake. The results: Not only was there no detectable olive oil flavor, but the cake was moister than usual—a noticeable improvement. Since then, I've seen a number of references to using olive oil in sweets, such as cakes, cookies, and quick breads. Some adventurous chefs even make ice cream with it (see "On the Town," page 75).

While the benefits of swapping canola oil for olive oil are debatable in some circles, there are many compelling reasons to try baking with olive oil instead of butter or shortening: Replacing saturated fat with monounsaturated fat can reduce your risk of coronary heart disease. Olive oil can actually help lower LDL (or "bad") cholesterol, while butter does just the opposite. And you will need considerably less olive oil than butter in any given recipe, which will reduce the amount of fat in your baked goods by up to one-third. (Naturally, all those health benefits come with the assumption that you're *replacing* butter with olive oil in your diet—not simply adding it.)

In fact, it was for health reasons that Micki Sannar, author of *Olive Oil Desserts* (www.oliveoil-desserts.com), first got interested in baking with olive oil. An avid baker, Sannar says giving up sweets wasn't an option when she and her husband were both diagnosed with high cholesterol. So, she began altering her many dessert recipes to incorporate olive oil instead of butter or shortening, ultimately publishing her cookbook—and in the process watching her cholesterol drop 100 points over seven years. But how do her desserts taste?

"Quite a few people write and say they taste better," Sannar says. While her recipes call for pure olive oil (a combination of refined olive oil and virgin or extra-virgin olive oil) for its mild flavor and lower cost, many bakers have successfully incorporated the headier extra-virgin olive oil into sweets—especially in chocolate desserts, where extra-virgin olive oil's fruity, peppery nuances really work. Her Chocolate Sin Cookies (see recipe on page 74) will make you a believer.

AT THE MARKET

A visit to one of these local businesses will provide free tastes, inspiration, and even a recipe or two to get you started baking with olive oil.

IL FUSTINO is a new Santa Barbara business (3401 State St., 888-798-4740; www.ilfustino.com) that offers a variety of on-tap olive oils and vinegars—many sourced locally—so customers can taste before they select their favorite for bottling. Company president Jim Kirkley says that Il Fustino's orange- and lemon-flavored olive oils are especially suited to baking (see Il Fustino's recipe for Orange Ginger Cake, opposite page).

OLEA FARM in Templeton (2985 Templeton Road, 805-610-2258; www.oleafarm.com) produces such baking-friendly olive oils as Lemon Blush (good for pound cake) and Basil Blush (good for brownies). Olea Farm co-owner Clotilde Julien notes that olive oil's high smoke point makes it very versatile—suitable for nearly any kind of cooking. Check out the farm's recipe for carrot cake made with olive oil, posted on the website.

PASOLIVO (8530 Vineyard Drive, 805-227-0186; www.pasolivo.com), a Paso Robles olive oil producer, offers a variety of citrus olive oils that are great for baking. "We probably use the Tangerine olive oil most often, as it's naturally the sweetest of the oils," says company hospitality director Jillian Waters. "In the tasting room, we offer shortbread and dark chocolate truffles made with the Tangerine olive oil. I've used the Lemon olive oil in yellow and white cake, and also in blueberry muffins. We've had customers make us cookies with the Lime olive oil."

WE OLIVE (294 E. Main St., Ventura, 805-648-6166; www.weolive.com; additional 805-area locations are in Paso Robles and San Luis Obispo) carries California-produced olive oils that have been certified as extra virgin by the California Olive Oil Commission. Ventura location proprietor Steve Tobey says that mission-variety olive oils, which tend to be milder, are a good choice for baking. "Another wonderful combination is brownies or chocolate desserts with the orange- or tangerine-flavored oils we carry," he says. "We make these brownies often; sales of the blood orange, mandarin orange, and tangerine oils soar on brownie-sample days."



IN THE KITCHEN

Olive Oil Desserts author Micki Sannar says that most dessert recipes can be adapted to use olive oil instead of butter, but with anywhere from $\frac{2}{3}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ cup olive oil needed to replace 1 cup of butter; there's no perfect conversion. That's why Sannar spent a long time developing the right ratio for each recipe in her book (especially the piecrust). To begin adapting your own recipes to use olive oil instead of butter, visit www.weolive.com for a recipe conversion chart (look under "Recipes"); be prepared to experiment a bit to determine the amount needed.

ORANGE GINGER CAKE

This recipe comes courtesy of Il Fustino (3401 State St., 888-798-4740; www.ilfustino.com). Using the shop's Orange Extra-Virgin Olive Oil gives this cake an extra punch of flavor.

- $\frac{2}{3}$ cup fresh orange juice
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup honey
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup orange extra-virgin olive oil (or plain extra-virgin olive oil)
- 2 eggs, separated
- 4 teaspoons orange zest, shredded
- 5 tablespoons candied ginger root, thinly sliced
- 1 $\frac{2}{3}$ cups all-purpose flour
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup granulated sugar
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt
- 2 tablespoons confectioners' sugar

Preheat oven to 350°F. Oil an 8-inch springform pan with olive oil, dust with flour, and tap out excess flour.

In a medium-sized bowl, stir together the orange juice, honey, olive oil, egg yolks, 3 teaspoons of the orange zest, and 3 tablespoons



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of the candied ginger. In a large bowl, sift together the flour, granulated sugar, baking powder, and salt. In yet another medium-sized bowl, beat the egg whites until soft peaks form.

Using a wooden spoon, stir the orange juice mixture into the flour mixture. Using a spatula, gently fold in the egg whites until they are well integrated. Pour the batter into the prepared pan.

Bake until a toothpick inserted into the center of the cake comes out clean, 45 minutes to 1 hour. Transfer the pan to a wire rack to cool for 10 minutes. Remove the sides of the band and let the cake cool completely. (If you wrap the cake in plastic wrap, it tastes even better the second day.) Just before serving, sift the confectioners' sugar evenly over the top, then sprinkle on the remaining 1 teaspoon zest. Decorate with the remaining 2 tablespoons candied ginger.

Serves 8.

CHOCOLATE SIN COOKIES

This recipe comes courtesy of Olive Oil Desserts by Micki Sannar (www.oliveoildesserts.com). To make the dough easier to work with, cover and refrigerate it for a few hours before baking to stiffen it up. These cookies come out looking just like the photo; they're delicious served warm or at room temperature, and they stay soft after they cool. We tried rolling them in powdered sugar as an alternative to granulated; they work well either way.

- ½ cup pure olive oil
- 1 ½ cups granulated sugar
- 3 large eggs, beaten
- 3 tablespoons milk
- 2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract
- ½ cup unsweetened dark cocoa
- 2 ⅔ cups flour (all-purpose or whole-wheat pastry flour)
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- ¾ teaspoon salt
- ¾ cups granulated sugar
- 36 chocolate chunks

Preheat oven to 375°F. Lightly coat large cookie sheets with olive oil cooking spray.

In mixer bowl add olive oil, sugar, eggs, and milk. Mix until well blended. Add vanilla and cocoa. Blend until smooth. Add flour, baking powder, and salt. Mix until well blended.

Drop by teaspoonfuls or by small-size cookie scoop into sugar and roll until coated. Place 3 per row (these cookies spread).

Bake for 7 to 10 minutes. Remove from oven and press a chunk of chocolate into the center of each cookie. Cool on wire racks.

Makes 36 to 42.

EXTREME LEMON SUGAR COOKIES

This recipe comes courtesy of Olive Oil Desserts by Micki Sannar (www.oliveoildesserts.com). We skipped the final dusting of powdered sugar when we made them and they were still wonderful.

ON THE TOWN

- 2/3 cup pure olive oil
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 1 large egg
- 2 1/2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract
- 2 tablespoons lemon zest (one large lemon)
- 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- 2 1/4 cups flour (all-purpose or whole-wheat pastry flour)
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 cup additional sugar for rolling
- 1/2 cup powdered sugar for dusting

Preheat oven to 375°F. Coat cookie sheets with olive oil cooking spray.

In a mixer bowl add olive oil, sugar, egg, vanilla, lemon zest, and lemon juice. Blend until smooth. Add flour, baking powder, baking soda, and salt. Mix until well blended.

Drop by teaspoonfuls or by a small-size cookie scoop into sugar and roll until well coated. Place on prepared cookie sheets.

Bake 8 minutes, cool on wire racks, dust with powdered sugar.

Makes 32 to 36.

With **WE OLIVE** (www.weolive.com) co-founder DeeDee Brown making olive oil ice cream and doling out free samples at last month's Paso Robles Olive Oil Festival, it's clear that olive oil desserts are catching on—especially in olive-oil-producing areas, where the creativity for such desserts flows. **BLACK CAT BISTRO** in Cambria (1602 Main St., 805-927-1600; www.blackcatbistro.com) has done special dinners with Pasolivo, inspiring several desserts on the ever-changing dessert menu. Look for such options as an orange olive oil-mascarpone ice cream with lemon olive oil and black pepper shortbread; a chocolate mousse cake made with zinfandel and orange-infused olive oil, served with olive oil-mascarpone ice cream and blood orange reduction; and an olive oil pound cake with fresh strawberries and olive oil-goat cheese ice cream, balsamic reduction drizzle, and basil syrup. **FEAST BISTRO** in Ojai (254 E. Ojai Ave., 805-640-9260; www.feastofjai.com) makes its signature Jeri's Citrus Olive Oil Cake with locally produced olive oil. They also serve Ojai Olive Oil on the table to enjoy with the rest of the meal. If you ever had the olive oil cake at San Luis Obispo's The Park Restaurant (which recently closed), you can still find this dessert through **MAEGEN LORING CATERING** (805-545-0000). **TYDES** restaurant in the Coral Casino at the Four Seasons Resort The Biltmore Santa Barbara (1281 Channel Drive, 805-565-8285; www.coralcasinoclub.com), which is open to hotel guests, offers its Honey and Almond Baklava dessert with a scoop of lemon-olive oil sorbet and manchego cheese. At **VILLA CREEK RESTAURANT** in Paso Robles (1144 Pine St., 805-238-3000; www.villacreek.com), the pastry chef makes a gelato with the locally produced Olea Farm Arbequina Olive Oil, as well as an olive oil cake. ■



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