



GUIDELINES FOR HEDONIC TASTING OF EXTRA VIRGIN OLIVE OILS FOR CONSUMERS IN THE RESTAURANT, HOSPITALITY AND CULINARY EDUCATION SECTORS

1. INTRODUCTION

Olive oil is a unique food product whose quality is defined by its organoleptic characteristics. In fact, it is the only food for which these characteristics are legislated as part of its official classification. Classification is conducted through tasting by trained and accredited tasting panels.

Extra virgin olive oil (EVOO) is not only one of the healthiest fats and a cornerstone of the Mediterranean diet, it also provides a rich sensory experience. Both consumers and professionals in the hospitality industry should be equipped to appreciate these qualities and enjoy olive oil through what is known as hedonistic tasting.

Hedonistic tasting focuses on the pleasure of tasting. It aims to familiarise participants with the sensory characteristics of high-quality EVOOs, including both their positive traits and the most common defects.

The EVOOs used in this tasting will have been categorised by a professional tasting panel, based on their organoleptic profile. The tasting itself must be guided by a professional taster who will introduce participants to the full sensory experience of olive oil.

As noted, extra virgin olive oil must be free of defects. This is a fundamental, non-negotiable criterion for this category.

Since only the highest-quality oils will be presented, some professional tasting elements—such as the analysis of minor defects or borderline cases—will not be included. Oils with any negative attributes will have been excluded in advance.

The session should begin with an introductory talk or explanatory video on olive oil production, covering aspects such as cultivation, harvesting, extraction, storage, and packaging. This is essential context, as the quality of EVOO is not accidental—it reflects year-round agricultural and technical efforts, particularly during harvest, milling, and post-processing stages.

Next comes the visual phase, where participants can enjoy the varying hues of green and yellow in the oils. While colour is not considered in professional tastings—since it is not a determinant of quality—it plays a valuable role in enhancing the sensory enjoyment during hedonistic tasting.

This is followed by the olfactory phase, in which the taster will guide participants through the aromatic profile of each oil, helping them identify specific scents.

Finally, we move to the gustatory phase, where participants taste the oils and experience their full flavour profile.

Throughout the session, the professional taster will explain the positive attributes of each EVOO, highlighting their distinctive qualities and virtues.

Hedonistic tasting is not only an enjoyable activity; it is also educational. It enables participants to recognise quality olive oil and make informed choices in the future—while deepening their appreciation for this remarkable product.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this guide is to provide professional tasters (educators) with key tools to introduce restaurateurs and consumers to the sensory appreciation of extra virgin olive oil through hedonic tasting.

3. SCOPE

These guidelines apply to EVOOs of varying organoleptic profiles, selected for their quality and sensory interest.

GUIDELINES FOR CONSUMERS

For consumers, a hedonic tasting of extra virgin olive oil should be a relaxed, enjoyable and less formal way to appreciate the flavours and aromas of different EVOOs, focusing on personal pleasure rather than technical analysis. It is an entertaining way to explore the nuances of extra virgin olive oil, often enjoyed with friends or in a smaller group, led by an olive oil professional taster.

Key aspects of an EVOO hedonic tasting for consumers:

1. **Purpose:** To create a multisensory, pleasurable journey through the world of olive oils—celebrating their flavours, textures, cultural roots and emotional resonance.
2. **Relaxed atmosphere:** The focus is less on technical notes but more about enjoying the experience.
3. **Guided by experts:** Olive oil qualified tasters or knowledgeable guides help to lead the tasting and provide insights.
4. **Flavour exploration:** The focus is on identifying and appreciating the diverse flavours and aromas of different EVOOs, from fruity and herbaceous to spicy and peppery.
5. **Personal preference:** It encourages individuals to develop their own preferences and appreciate the unique characteristics of each oil.
6. **Organoleptic properties:** Participants learn to discern nuances like bitterness, pungency (peppery), and other flavours that distinguish high-quality EVOOs.
7. **Olive oil selection:** Choose 3–5 diverse EVOOs of different:
 - 7.1. Varieties
 - 7.2. Origins
 - 7.3. Flavour profiles (fruity green or mature, spicy, bitter)
 - 7.4. Harvest periods (include at least one early harvest oil for its intensity, and one delicate oil, harvested later on, for contrast.)
8. **No pressure:** Unlike formal tastings, there is no pressure to memorise specific tasting notes or follow strict protocols.

Why hedonic tastings are valuable:

1. **Appreciation for quality:** They help consumers understand the difference between high-quality EVOO and lower quality oils.
2. **Enhanced enjoyment:** By understanding the nuances of EVOO, consumers can better appreciate and enjoy it in their cooking and everyday life.
3. **Learning and exploration:** They offer a fun and informative way to learn about different olive oil varieties and production regions.
4. **Social experience:** These tastings are often enjoyed in a social setting, fostering a sense of community and shared appreciation for quality food.

GUIDELINES FOR THE RESTAURANT, HOSPITALITY AND CULINARY EDUCATION SECTORS

A hedonic tasting of extra virgin olive oils for hotels and restaurants is a curated event or session designed to showcase different types, qualities and flavour profiles of olive oil to culinary professionals. The goal is to educate chefs, food and beverage (F&B) managers and procurement teams about the characteristics and potential culinary applications of various olive oils so they can select the best options for their menus and kitchens.

Key aspects of an EVOO hedonic tasting for the hospitality industry:

1. Purpose:

- 1.1. Introduce high-quality extra virgin olive oils (EVOOs).
- 1.2. Highlight differences in origin, variety and production methods.
- 1.3. Demonstrate pairing possibilities with dishes served in restaurants and hotels.
- 1.4. Assist decision-makers in selecting oils for cooking, finishing and table service

2. Target audience:

- 2.1. Executive chefs
- 2.2. Restaurant owners and managers
- 2.3. Hotel F&B directors
- 2.4. Purchasing managers

3. EVOO tasting structure:

3.1. Welcome and introduction:

- 3.1.1. Overview of olive oil production and benefits of high-quality EVOO
- 3.1.2. Importance of choosing the right oil for culinary excellence

3.2. Tasting session:

- 3.2.1. Tasting 4–6 olive oils from different regions or varieties
- 3.2.2. Use of coloured tasting glasses (to prevent colour bias) or clear cups in informal settings
- 3.2.3. Guided by professional tasters or producers
- 3.2.4. Focus on EVOO aroma, flavour, bitterness, pungency and balance

3.3. Food pairings:

- 3.3.1. Provide small bites to showcase how each oil complements various types of foods (e.g. bread, tomatoes, cheese, fish, desserts)
- 3.3.2. Selected dishes from the host's menu prepared using different olive oils for comparative tasting

3.4. Educational component:

- 3.4.1. How to store and preserve olive oil
- 3.4.2. Common defects to avoid (rancid, musty, fusty)
- 3.4.3. Understanding labels: PDO, PGI, organic, cold-extracted

3.5. Business and sourcing discussion:

- 3.5.1. Information on wholesale purchasing
- 3.5.2. Custom packaging or private-label options for hotels/restaurants
- 3.5.3. Sustainability and origin traceability

4. Benefits for hotels & restaurants:

- 4.1. Better-informed purchases based on taste and quality, not just price
- 4.2. Enhanced guest experience through high-quality oil use
- 4.3. Potential for using olive oil as a signature ingredient or for table service

5. Optional add-ons:

- 5.1. Branded tasting kits or take-home samples
- 5.2. Cooking demonstration using selected oils
- 5.3. Printed or digital guide to olive oil tasting and pairing

6. Sample olive oils to include:

- 6.1. **Delicate fruity oils:** oils with light olive fruitiness, smooth bitterness and pungency, non-persistent.
- 6.2. **Sweet, light-fruity oils:** oils with a mild olive fruitiness, slight bitterness and pungency.
- 6.3. **Delicate, medium-fruity oils:** oils with medium fruitiness, delicate bitterness and pungency.
- 6.4. **Bitter, medium-fruity oils:** oils with medium fruitiness, intense bitterness and pungency.
- 6.5. **Complex, well-balanced fruity oils:** oils that display a rich and layered fruitiness, with multiple notes of fruits and aromatic herbs. They are characterised by high overall intensity, typically accompanied by bitterness and pungency ranging from mild to medium.
- 6.6. **Complex, bitter-fruity oils:** oils with intense fruitiness and plenty of aromatic notes, intense bitterness and pungency.