

WELL OILED

Olio Verde

EVERY DAY, THE Olio Verde family inspects its estate's 3,000 olive trees. Thanks to decades of care and an eco-friendly approach, any issues with the fruit are identified early. This dedication is shared by all of the founding family and is one of the reasons why its olive oil has an international reputation for quality.

Valeria Becchina and her two sisters now own Olio Verde, a company founded in 1985 by their parents and based in the west of Sicily. There is only one type of olive they grow – the Nocellara del Belice. Fleshy and green, the Nocellara was traditionally eaten as a delicacy until Valeria and her family turned the fruit into oil.

“We were the first company to do this,” says Valeria. “It is one of the most precious varieties in the world for curing and table consumption, and doesn't yield much oil. But the oil it does produce is like an elixir – rich and fruity with undertones of banana and ripe fruit. And the special process we use to make the oil means it is of exceptional quality and sought after by chefs and those who appreciate the best.”

The process Valeria refers to includes harvesting the crop very early, at the beginning of October or even the end of September instead of late October or November. “The longer the wait then the more oil,” says Valeria. “But this means losing our exclusive flavours of freshness and fruitiness, which people fall in love with. It also means less polyphenols, which are a health-protecting anti-oxidant.”

The polyphenol content is also preserved because the olives are immediately milled and crushed, which prevents fermentation and acidity.

These factors both undermine the anti-oxidant content, which is also preserved through cold pressing, a technique where the temperature never rises – in this case – above 21°C. Special purified water is even used at every stage of production and fruits are grown from trees fed with organic fertiliser.

“The legal limit for olive oil acidity is 0.8 per cent,” explains Valeria. “Most oils are around 0.4, but ours is 0.1 per cent – years after production it still tastes perfect. Our approach is incredibly meticulous – we only select the best olives – and we control the whole process from producing to selling.”

With an output of 100,000 bottles a year, Olio Verde's oils are in demand globally, selling well in the US and even in Japan where people enjoy drizzling it over raw seafood. Many leading chefs are great fans and appreciate the way Olio Verde offers the perfect extra virgin olive oil for each recipe from two brand lines. It is also a key ingredient in Valeria's animal-fat-free chocolate cake for the family parties.

The company discloses the harvest week of each extra virgin olive oil to ensure maximum transparency and versatility. Through these precise production methods, it is able to obtain varying flavours, tones and colours.

Olio Verde is very much a family affair that is set to continue. Valeria's teenage son Daniel is already learning the art of olive-oil making from his surroundings. “Looking after olive trees is like bringing up children – you have to nurture them,” says Valeria. “And no one does this better than this great family.” — www.olioverde.it

