

PENNY SAVER NEWS

Sept 25, 2014

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Keep the Oils Happy

With the growing popularity of specialty oils such as sesame, walnut, grape seed and more, and of course their growing price tags, it's a real pity to lose a bottle due to bad flavor. Knowing how to handle and store them can make a world of difference.

Oils by nature have lots of unsaturated fats. That's what makes them oils instead of solid fat. That is also what makes oils more healthy for us than butter, margarine or lard. Solid fats can be converted into cholesterol to plug our arteries. Oils will not be. But because oils are not saturated, they are more open to attack by air, oxygen in particular. An oil that has been attacked by oxygen has been *oxidized*. Just as iron that is rusted no longer looks the same, oxidized oil will no longer taste or smell the same. In fact, badly oxidized oil is rancid. It stinks. It tastes bad. And there is nothing you can do to cover up the flavor of rancid fat. Ugh!

Open a bottle of oil and take a sniff. If it smells strong, or like old paint, it's gone. If you're not sure, put a few tablespoons in a small skillet and heat it gently. If it doesn't smell fresh and mild, it's rancid. And rancid oil can only be thrown out. Don't pour it down the drain, no sense in letting it plug up that piping too! Just put the whole bottle in a plastic bag and into the garbage.

Any oil can become rancid, but some are more likely to suffer this way. Some oil is more unsaturated than others. More unsaturation means faster rancidity. And some oils are naturally milder in flavor. You're more likely to notice rancidity in them.

What causes rancidity? Air. The action of the air is speeded up by light and heat. So the cooler and darker that oil is kept and the less air it is exposed to, the longer it will last. This is why olive oils are usually sold in green or brown bottles, or metal cans. Don't store bottles of oil above the stove, on the windowsill or on the counter. Sunlight can create some really strong, nasty flavors, especially in olive oil. Keep all oils in a closed cupboard. Cool and dark are the happy words.

Some oils are so sensitive to light and warmth that they should be kept in the refrigerator. Sesame and walnut oils, and even good olive oil, deserve the colder storage. Don't worry if they turn cloudy or seem thicker in the refrigerator. What you see are the results of crystals of oil forming.

They will clear and get liquid again when they warm up. Most other oils do fine in the cupboard or pantry.

Buy oil in the smallest amount that you can reasonably use in about 3 to 6 months. Partially used bottles of oil have more air in them. And more air means worse flavor. Specialty oils such as walnut and grape seed will have their best flavors if used in less than 3 months from the time they are opened. So, small bottles are definitely the best choice. Olive and other oils should be good for a year.

If you must buy gallons of oil at a time, for a turkey fryer for example, store it in containers that will have the least amount of empty (air) space in them. And if you really want to save the used oil for future use strain it through several layers of cheese cloth, or coffee filters before you store it. Any little bits of fried turkey skin will speed up how fast the whole can of oil turns rancid. So make it as clean as possible.

Finally, check for either a Use By date or an expiration date on the bottle, and try to use the oil before then. After the date if it smells okay it is fine to use, but the flavor will be going downhill. People who use lots of olive oil will be able to smell the rancidity starting even before a use by date. Trust your nose.

Pesto is a traditional, olive oil and pine nut-based sauce. Here's a newer version of the standard green pesto. You can stir it into hot pasta, spread it on cheese or dip pita breads into it. Use a good tasting, good smelling, good quality olive oil for the best flavor.

Roasted Red Pesto

¼ cup slivered almonds, toasted	1 roasted red pepper, fresh or jarred
¼ cup oil-packed sundried tomatoes	1 clove garlic
1 Tbsp red wine vinegar	1 cup parsley leaves
¼ cup extra virgin olive oil	½ tsp kosher salt, black pepper to taste

Put all ingredients in a food processor and pulse until completely blended and minced together. Serve immediately or refrigerate for a day or two. Makes 1½ cups.

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