

■ FLAVOR

# California gold



Submitted photo by Patti Bess

Holiday Olive Tapenade, featuring olive oil from a foothill farm, makes a great appetizer for parties or get-togethers.

## Foothill olive farms production, quality on rise

Besides great flavor, olive oil is rich in cancer-fighting antioxidants. It's primarily made up of monounsaturated fats, which help drive out the bad cholesterol without reducing the good. EVOO (extra virgin olive oil) as television chef, Rachel Ray has dubbed it, is an excellent source of vitamin E and other compounds such as omega-3 oils. Consumers pay a premium price for it and assume they're getting quality, but as the song goes, "it ain't necessarily so."



**PATTI BESS**  
Local food connection

In his book, "Extravirginity," Tom Mueller writes of billion dollar olive oil swindles that are perpetrated around the world and how they have deceived the public for years. At one time, olive oil was the most adulterated agricultural product in the European Union, prompting the E.U.'s anti-fraud office to establish an olive-oil task force. "Profits were comparable to cocaine trafficking with none of the risks," one investigator commented in an interview with Mueller.

The greatest health benefits (and nuances of flavor) are found in the unrefined, fresh virgin olive oil grade. Although it is hard to find statistics, some estimate that only about five percent of the world's production is of extra virgin quality.

Olive oil is far more valuable than most other vegetable oils. It is costly and time-consuming to produce — and surprisingly easy to doctor. Lower grade oils can be sanitized with chemicals to remove imperfections. It is often the second pressing, which is usually heated, destroying much of the antioxidants. Some inexpensive oils are actually not olive oil at all but a blend of Turkish hazelnut oil and Argentine sunflower seed oil, which is blended with a little olive. There are no standards in the U.S.

requiring that the label "extra virgin" be accurate.

For the past two decades, the California olive oil industry has been rebounding with great gusto, and Sierra growers and producers have as much passion for the fruit as the 49ers had for their gold. Many food aficionados have likened it to the booming growth of California wines in the 1980s and '90s. Currently, olive oil is the fastest growing specialty crop with more than 30,000 acres planted and two million gallons expected to be produced in the 2012 harvest season.

The California Olive Oil Council (COOC) reports that olive oil production has increased 25 to 40 percent year after year. Established in 1992, the COOC supports local growers, as well as educating the public about the health values of olive oil.

"The COOC prides itself with high standards, traceability and quality assurance," said Patricia Darragh, executive director. "We have established a sensory taste panel, which certifies over 200 California oils each year for extra virgin grade."

They are also working with Congress to develop national import standards.

Olives were brought to California by the Spanish explorers, and by 1860, there were olive trees planted at each of the state's 21 missions. The town of Oroville, in Butte County, is considered the birthplace of California's commercial olive industry. The story goes that in



Submitted photo

Olives from Calolea Olive Oil in Bangor.

1895, Freda Ehrman, 56, was widowed and turned to the only asset she had for her livelihood — 20 acres of olive trees. Marketing them in the Northwest and Chicago, she began the first commercial olive oil production in California. Throughout the 19th century, the industry thrived, but by the 1950s, it was in serious decline.

Some of the finest quality oils in the world (just a little prejudice thrown in

See OLIVE C4

### FOOTHILL OLIVE FARMS

California olive oils make wonderful Christmas gifts and fine holiday entrees. Check out these local producers.

#### APOLLO OLIVE OIL:

Located in Oregon House. Their oils are available locally at BriarPatch Co-op, SPD, Flour Garden Bakery and the Wooden Spoon. For more information call (877) 776-0703 or [www.apollooliveoil.com](http://www.apollooliveoil.com)

#### GOLD HILL OLIVE OIL COMPANY:

Located a few miles from Coloma at 5601 Gold Hill Road (between Cold Springs and Lotus Roads). Their historic tasting room is open from 10 to 5 p.m. weekends. For more information call: (530) 621-7073

#### SIERRA D'ORO OLIVE OILS:

Oregon House, offers fresh pressed oils, cosmetics and accessories all summer at the Nevada City Farmer's Market, at various festivals, and online at: [www.sierradoro.com](http://www.sierradoro.com). For more information contact them at: (530) 692-2001

#### CALOlea OLIVE OIL:

Tasting room open by appointment at 68 Tennessee Road in Bangor, Calif. They will be selling their oils and balsamic vinegars at both Cornish and Victorian Christmas events. Products are also available throughout the year at the Wooden Spoon, Bierwagons' Farm Store in Chicago Park, SPD and the Grass Valley Farmer's Market. For more information [www.calolea.com](http://www.calolea.com) or (530) 749-1240



## OLIVE:

Continued from C1

there) are grown right here in the Sierra Foothills. Not so much in Nevada County but in surrounding counties of Yuba, Tehama, Placer and Butte. Our hot dry summers and rocky soils are similar to conditions in the Mediterranean and perfect for growing olives. Several local producers have won prestigious awards that prove this fact.

“If consumers really want olive oil that has the flavor and health benefits they expect, it’s probably best to buy from local growers that you know and trust,” said Monica Keller of

Calolea Olive Oil.

A Sierra d’Oro Holiday Farm and Winery tour is happening from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Dec. 15 and 16. Fourteen farms and wineries are participating. Olive tasting will be available at Calolea Olive Oil, 68 Tennessee Lane in Bangor. They plan to release their “Olio Nuovo” (fresh press) that weekend, and it will be available for purchase. For information call; [www.sierraoro.org](http://www.sierraoro.org) or call 749-1240

Patti Bess is a local freelance writer and cookbook author. She has written and developed recipes for Land O Lakes publications, Weight Watchers, and more than 20 other magazines.

### HOLIDAY OLIVE TAPENADE

**12 slices French baguette**  
**5 green onions, best sections only**  
**8 Kalamata olives**  
**3 tablespoons extra virgin Calolea Manzanillo olive oil plus two to brush on bread**  
**2 to 4 cloves garlic**  
**6 small, dense cherry tomatoes or two Romas (about one quarter cup)**  
**2 tablespoons walnuts or pine nuts**  
**About 5 sprigs fresh parsley, stems removed**

#### Steps

Cut about 12 slices of a fresh baguette. Brush each with olive oil and toast for two to four minutes at 350 degrees.

Place the ingredients into a food processor leaving the one tablespoon olive oil to drizzle over at the end. Whiz with bursting motion so as not to completely puree and spoon onto breads to serve.



Olive oil is the fastest growing specialty crop in the state with more than 30,000 acres planted and two million gallons expected to be produced in the 2012 harvest season. Sierra foothill farms, such as Calolea Olive Oil contribute to that figure.

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