

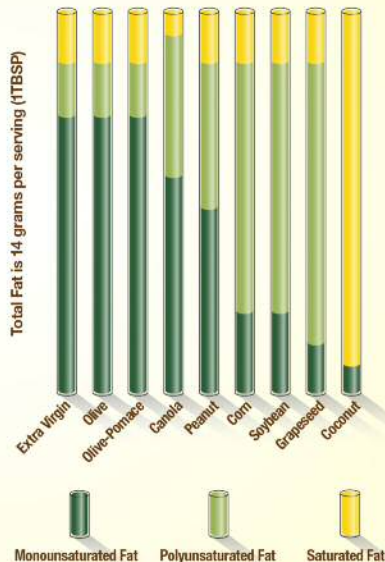
Cooking with Olive Oils

One of the most common myths Americans believe about olive oil is that you can't or shouldn't cook with it. Consider a little science showing not only why you CAN cook with olive oil, but also why it is a GOOD choice for cooking!

Cooking oils contain different kinds of fat and some are more stable than others. Saturated fat is most stable but least healthful. Monounsaturated Fat (MUFA) is highly stable and has documented health benefits. Finally, Polyunsaturated Fat (PUFA) is least stable and will break down more quickly, especially when heated.

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This chart shows the grams per serving of each kind of fat in various cooking oils.



For overall stability, olive oils come out on top. Even better, olive oils have antioxidants that fend off oxygen and provide greater stability when heated. Extra virgin olive oils retain the most antioxidants. Olive oil will have antioxidants in varying amounts based on how much virgin olive oil is blended with the refined olive oil. Olive oils can even be re-used for cooking a few times if filtered after each use.

The inevitable question is “What about smoke point? I heard olive oils have a low smoke point.” The ideal stovetop cooking temperature is about 350°F, which is relatively low, so most olive oils will not smoke at this temperature.

Besides stability, the fat content affects the smoke point. PUFAs usually have higher smoke points and saturated fats have lower smoke points, with MUFAs in the middle. Smoke point is also linked to the free fatty acids (FFA) in oil, and lower FFA indicates higher smoke point. Refined oils have very low FFA and since most cooking oils are refined, they have more consistent and relatively

high smoke points. Due to the natural variability of olive oils, the smoke point is more accurately reflected along a range.

The FFA for extra virgin olive oil can range from very low, about 0.2%, up to the global standard limit of 0.8%, resulting in a smoke point range of about 350° F to 410° F. This is perfectly acceptable for most cooking, including sautéing, grilling, and shallow frying.

Since olive oil is primarily refined olive oil with some virgin olive oil added, the range is more consistent and higher, typically 390° F to 468° F. Again, olive oil is well-suited for all general cooking, light frying and baking.

Olive oil is one of the most stable cooking oil choices. Although the smoke point is variable and relatively low, the temperature range is above the ideal temperature for most cooking. Olive oils can be safely (and tastefully!) used for nearly every cooking style in your kitchen.

