

Homemade cranberry-almond biscotti paired with Lancaster County Coffee Roaster's Lancaster Signature Blend. Cranberry-walnut olive oil was chosen over vegetable oil, adding a warm, seasonally rich flavor while reducing saturated fat.

Holiday Baking WITH INFUSED OLIVE OILS

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY JORDAN BUSH

'Tis the season to be merry, and for many that means indulging in holiday treats. Cakes and cookies, sweetbreads and pies, the annual marathon of taste-tempting baked goods has begun! However, before you start baking for the season, you may want to add a surprising and healthy ingredient to your shopping list: infused olive oils.



Blood orange-infused olive oil, local eggs and Wilbur's Dutch Processed Cocoa Powder took these brownies to another level of tastiness. Bright orange notes paired with the bittersweet chocolate makes for a fresh spin on a timeless classic.

To say I have “a” sweet tooth ignores the other 31 teeth that match the same description. Of course, the holidays are challenging for those of us who love good food – especially baked goods and desserts. We do our best to monitor our caloric intake (even loosening up our “budgets” a bit), but when you’re bouncing around at events and meals between Thanksgiving and New Year’s, any semblance of self-control seems to disappear. Have you noticed you can’t even walk into an office and not be enticed to sample the candy, cookies and other goodies that are free for the taking?

The fact that I haven’t addressed desserts in the column hasn’t gone unnoticed by friends and fellow foodies. Granted, other than a few Southern specialties, like the King Cake and beignets, and Holy Trinity’s famous fasnachts, baked goods have been missing in action from the column. So, with Christmas around the corner, I’m addressing the white elephant in the room.

THROUGHOUT 2019, one of my favorite cooking ingredients has been infused olive oils. Available in a wide range of flavors, they are brilliant choices for glazes on vegetables and meat tossed on the grill. Surprisingly, they’re also perfect for baking purposes. Now, if you’re thinking “basil-and-herb sugar cookies,” that’s not what I have in mind. Rather, imagine pairings of citrus and chocolate and nuts and fruit.

As you will discover, there’s a realm of sweet and tangy infused olive oils that will add dimension to your baking. After all, olives are considered a fruit – stone fruit to be more precise – which sounds better-suited for baking sweets. Think dough, cakes, truffles, strudels and biscotti.

Resources on baking with infused olive oils are somewhat sparse, though new ideas are popping up all the time. For example, I sampled blood-orange brownies at The Olive Basin (Kitchen Kettle Village) this summer and was hooked. I discovered that baking brownies with blood-orange infused olive oil adds a subtle, citrusy tang, which pairs perfectly with the bittersweet cocoa. The brownies were moist, chewy and wonderfully complex. Requiring only a glass of milk or bowl of vanilla ice cream, sadly absent at the time, it was a match made in heaven. The thoughtful twist on a classic dessert recipe motivated me to further explore the possibilities that are out there.



Lemon cake made with lemon-infused olive oil, which replaced butter and lemon zest in the bake. It’s finished with powdered sugar and fresh lemon zest. The spongy texture is full of moisture yet crumbles nicely with each bite.



Cranberry-Walnut Extra Virgin Olive Oil (EVOO) from Olio Olive Oil & Balsamics in Lititz. Other sources for olive oil products include Seasons Olive Oil and Vinegar Taproom in Lancaster, S. Clyde Weaver in East Petersburg and The Olive Basin at Kitchen Kettle Village in Intercourse.



INFUSED OLIVE OILS

Generally speaking, infused olive oils are made by adding concentrated oil extracts, such as citrus oil, to olive oil. In substituting infused olive oil for extracts in baking, extracts use alcohol to capture flavors, which is less potent than oil; a few drops per teaspoon of extract is probably adequate.

Olive oils flavored with lemon, Persian lime, blood orange, walnut, hazelnut and pistachio are my starting suggestions for baking. While the nature of infused olive oils is still savory, they’re also more dynamic, ranging from sweet to tangy with the inclusion of oils from citrus and nuts. They can also be blended for combined

flavor characteristics. Tasting a drop of infused olive oil side by side with canola, the flavor difference is striking and bright. It’s almost a surprise they’re not the first choice in baking due to their fruity taste and robust flavor.

VARIETIES

In baking recipes where you simply want to replace cooking oil with unflavored olive oil, start with extra virgin olive oil. It is a choice and unrefined oil that’s made by cold pressing the olive fruit without heating it to a degree that will adversely affect flavor.

Extra virgin olive oil that is unfiltered has a cloudy, green appearance with identical textures and tastes, reminiscent of freshly cut



Truffles made with extra virgin olive oil, Ghirardelli 60% dark chocolate, unsalted butter and dusted with Wilbur's Dutch Processed Cocoa Powder.

grass. That can be great for cooking but less ideal for baking. Pure olive oil is another variety to avoid when baking. It's processed or refined to aid lower-quality oil and is best suited for frying.

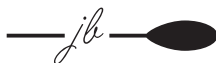
When altering recipes, swap equal parts of olive oil for vegetable oil. Butter contains water, so when substituting olive oil for melted butter, keep in mind that oil is higher in (healthier) fat, so less is required. Substitute 3/4 oil to one-part butter. When creaming butter with sugar, oil cannot be substituted.

When not in use, store sealed olive oil containers in a cool, dark cupboard to prevent oxidization.

HEALTH BENEFITS

While my initial use of olive oils for baking wasn't for health reasons, we should discuss nutritional benefits. I was drawn to infused olive oils because, when used well, they make food taste better, but the health benefits carry ample merit on their own. Olive oils contain antioxidants and monounsaturated fats, which are liquid at room temperature, healthier than saturated fats and promote healthy cholesterol. Those among us watching our triglyceride levels will find benefits substituting olive oil for butter and unhealthier cooking oils in recipes.

While high in calories, the monounsaturated fats in olive oil can help to lower total levels of cholesterol and bad LDL cholesterol. While it means that food prepared with olive oil will be healthier, it's not a free pass into caloric bliss. Getting a head start during the holidays will give way to better New Year's resolutions of improved health and matters involving the bathroom scale.



Recipes

For recipe inspiration, I turned to several sources.

- From Alice Medrich's cookbook, *Sinfully Easy Delicious Desserts*, I prepared chocolate truffles with extra virgin olive oil and orange zest. Alicemedrich.com/recipe/chocolate-truffles-with-extra-virgin-olive-oil/
- From The Olive Basin, blood-orange olive oil brownies. www.kitchenkettle.com/recipe/blood-orange-olive-oil-brownies.asp
- From *All Recipes*, almond and cranberry biscotti with a cranberry-walnut oil. Allrecipes.com/recipe/17241/biscotti/
- From *Better Homes & Gardens*, lemon olive oil cake. Bhg.com/recipe/lemon-olive-oil-cake/



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