



# cucina della terra

from harvest to table

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## EXPERIENCE UMBRIA IN AUTUMN!

Register for our  
upcoming classes in  
Oct/Nov 2009

## A Note from Chef Gerri



*"Hello, how are you? It is still very hot here and it never rains! Your olive trees are doing fine but we're all hoping that it will rain soon—otherwise most of the olives will fall off!"*

*—2008 e-mail from neighbor Marilena*

In a few short months, I'll become a contadina (country woman) along with the many Italian families and aziende (agricultural businesses) who will begin the harvest of olives. The olive trees are as much a part of the landscape as sunflowers, grape vines, vegetable gardens, and fruit trees. Hopeful expectations mix with high anxiety. Nature and humans played their parts during the preceding months. Was there enough rain or an unexpected hailstorm? Was pruning well done and timed properly? Was there any Insect infestation? It wasn't until I opened a cooking school, Cucina Della Terra, in Umbria, Italy, that I began to better understand this magical fruit. Scattered around the property were 33 short trees with silvery leaves that never seemed to drop off their branches. With the help of my two generous neighbors, Marilena and Piero, I learned how to hand pick my green and black fruits

in a blustery November wind, letting them drop to the ground that had been covered with nets. As each tree was denuded of its fruits, I gathered up the netting and dropped the olives into a basket. There they lay for three days. At our assigned time we loaded our olives into cars and drove to the frantoio (olive mill). Thus began the process of pressing olives and extracting the oil. The following morning we collected our bottles of oil. I was given 12 liters. It was about a 15.5% yield. When you factor in the labor, the pruning and care of the trees, it's not a mystery why olive oil is a costly ingredient—and it's worth the price for the quality. We are excited to prepare for our upcoming classes in October where students will experience the oil pressing firsthand. I thought it would be helpful to share more information about Italy's liquid gold in this issue.

Ciao, Gerri

# Olive Oil: Italy's Liquid Gold

## The significance of the bottle and label

Although dark colored bottles are more expensive, they are necessary to protect the oil from light. The label tells you whether the oil is Extra Virgin Olive Oil (EVOO), which means it is solely made from olives that have less than 1% acidity. The EVOO standard assures you that the oil has not been refined which explains why the oil retains more of its healthy natural vitamins, anti-oxidants and minerals and is a

## Where does the oil originate?

The label tells you if the olives were grown in Italy. Today, 18 out of the 20 regions of Italy are producing olive oil. The DOP, Denominazione d'Origine Protetta (Protected Designation of Origin) designation, if any, indicates the origin of the region. Although this may be important for the large producers, it is really meaningless because the DOP label can tell you that the olives come from a particular region, but in no way does it assure you that the



olives have been stored properly, pressed within a few days of harvest, or that the oil is not refined or altered chemically.

## The meaning of the expiration date

By law, oil must have an expiration date 18 months from the pressing of the olives. Good oils with low peroxides will last much longer. If you see good olive oils discounted because the expiration date is near or expired, the oil may still be good, but less flavorful.



## Selection, taste, and appearance

When selecting an olive oil, you have to know your merchant; price is not always an indication. Does your merchant store the oil in a cool, dark place or does he know where the oil comes from? As for taste, ultimately you must rely on your own preferences and those who cook and dine with you! Be prepared for bitter and pungent flavors along with hints of artichokes, fruit, grass, or hay. These are all good traits. Don't be sure it's quality oil just because of oil's color. Most people are surprised to learn that olive oil is poured into colored glasses during taste



testing. Why? The color green is no indication of the quality of the oil. The earlier the olive is picked, the greener the olive, lending a higher concentration of chlorophyll to the oil. It's that simple.

### **Consider what you are using olive oil for when preparing dishes**

An expensive bottle of olive oil recently pressed is worthy of crudo preparations, meaning reserve it for bruschette, salads, cooked fish, meats and vegetables, gelato and fruits where you can appreciate the extraordinary flavors. If you are going to fry, sauté or grill, select the discounted oils that are still wholesome but less flavorful.

### **You always pay for quality**

Like a great wine, a great olive oil is expensive. However, remember that your choices help to support the small growers, producers, and passionate merchants—while giving you enormous pleasure as you inhale and ingest the extraordinary olive oil. What's more, it's a heart-healthy choice.

Saluti!

## **To Learn More and To Buy Italian Olive Oils, Check Out The Following Links**

**<http://www.gustiamo.com>**

**<http://www.oliveoilsource.com>**

**<http://www.ercoleolivario.com>**

**<http://www.dipaloselects.com>**

**visit us at <http://www.cucinadellaterra.com>**

# MARILENA'S CAULIFLOWER BRUSCHETTE

*Bruschette con Cavolfiore*

## Ingredients

1 head of cauliflower  
2 cloves of garlic, peeled & minced  
2 tablespoons of kosher salt  
pepper  
1 day old loaf of Italian Bread, cut ½ inch thick  
1 clove of garlic, peeled  
A liberal amount of olive oil from the first press



## Procedure

1. Remove the root and leaves from a head of cauliflower. Cut the flowers into individual florets.
2. Bring a pot of water to a boil. Add the salt. When the water returns to a boil, plunge the florets into the boiling water. Boil the cauliflower about 12 minutes or until very soft. Drain.
3. Heat a pan large enough to accommodate the cauliflower. Add enough olive oil to coat the bottom of the pan. Add garlic and cook gently for 1 minute without browning. Add the cauliflower and begin to mash with a wooden spoon. Continue to cook and mash until the cauliflower looks almost like mashed potatoes. Drizzle addition olive oil.
4. Heat a grill. When hot, place the slices of bread on the grates and grill until marked. Turn and grill the other sides.
5. Scrape off anything that looks burned. Rub the garlic over the bread. Sprinkle with salt if the bread is salt less. Drizzle an abundant amount of olive oil over the bread.
6. Spoon some of the cauliflower over each bread slice. Serve with a glass of Italian wine, white or red.