



The joy of olive oil lies in its many delightful aromas and flavours, from voluptuous ripe olive to bright green grassy notes and from a soft subtle finish to a zippy peppery kick. There is a world of sensory exploration awaiting the adventurer. But like any great explorer, you will be faced with risks, crocodiles in the placid waters. The sad truth is that most people are accustomed to the flavour of olive oil that has passed its best. Olive oil is no longer an occasional presence in the kitchen so it is time to change that. We need to start by recognizing one essential fact about olive oil, it is a perishable product. Olive oil tastes best when it is fresh. Think of olive oil on a freshness continuum that goes from just-made, harvest-fresh at one end, to completely rancid at the other. How long it takes an olive oil to go from one end of this freshness continuum to the other depends on many factors: storage temperature, exposure to air and light, and the amount of natural antioxidants in the olive oil in the first place. All olive oils, even the finest ones, will go off eventually. This is why you must never hoard olive oil: use it and enjoy it. Waiting for a special occasion to use your good olive oil? How about dinner! It's olive oil, not a fine wine! Do you have a clear sense of what rancid oil smells and tastes like? A good image for many people is the smell of crayons. Another hint is something that almost everyone has tasted, old peanuts, with that soapy taste. Rancid is fat gone bad, something all of us have encountered at some time. On a rancid scale of 0 to 10, almost everyone will notice a 9 or a 10. The trick is to develop the confidence to pick out rancidity when it is a 5, or a 3, or lower. The flavour of rancidity in olive oil is usually accompanied by a greasy mouth-feel; in fact, the greasiness often is noticeable first.

Go to your cupboard and pull out the olive oil. How old is it? Is there a 'Best Before' date on the bottle? Generally that date is two years from the time that it was bottled. Unfortunately, that doesn't tell you when it was harvested and milled. Sniff it. Taste it. Crayons? Putty? Old peanuts?

If so it's time to say goodbye....

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