



Sensory Analysis of Olive Oil

Benefits of Sensory Analysis

Sensory analysis of olive oil is the evaluation of an oil's organoleptic attributes, which are appreciated through the senses of smell and taste. Sensory analysis is an essential part of evaluating olive oil quality and complements chemical analysis, both of which are requirements for determining the grade (quality) of olive oil according to International Olive Council (IOC) and new USDA standards.

Producers and marketers who choose to submit oils for official USDA or IOC certifications are limited to specific laboratories that execute a battery of comprehensive chemical tests as well as blind sensory assessments performed by a panel of between 8 and 12 trained tasters. This is an expensive process.

In a crowded and competitive marketplace, producers, importers and marketers need a cost-effective way to obtain information about their oil's quality and characteristics, to make informed decisions about marketing their products to consumers and distinguishing their oil from others.

Descriptive Marketing Language

Olive oil marketers can benefit from expert organoleptic analysis of their oil which provides consumers with a comprehensive product description

Similar to wine marketing, olive oil sensory analysis can offer consumer-friendly descriptions of the oil's aromas and flavors that helps to educate consumers on best ways to use the oil.

Attributes such as *fruity*, *bitter* or *pungent* may resonate with some consumers, while others may be looking for more complex descriptions such as: *green or ripe banana*, *tomato leaf*, *herbaceous*, *apricot*, *grassy*, *peppery* and *astringent*. The list of possible descriptors is a long one.



Detecting Flavor Defects

By definition, extra virgin olive oils must be free of sensory defects. The IOC identifies common defects such as fusty, musty, winy, muddy, metallic and rancid. Detection of even the slightest amount of any of these defects disqualifies the oil from achieving the highest grade of Extra Virgin.

Sensory assessment is the most reliable method for detection of these flavor defects, which cannot be measured in the laboratory. Used in conjunction with chemical analysis, sensory assessment provides quality assessment, a proactive due diligence step in risk management.

Early Detection of Rancidity

Olive oil quality decays with time. Even the best olive oils may show signs of rancidity within 12 to 24 months of milling. The onset of rancidity may be aggravated by improper transportation and storage or exposure to light, as in store shelves.

Olive oil marketers may benefit by checking their inventories for signs of oxidation and rancidity, which can be detected by combining sensory analysis and ultraviolet absorbance.

Olive oil importers may verify new suppliers' quality and periodically validate consistency in their supply.

Determining Oil Profile (Style)

Determining an olive oil's profile is not easy. Many producers have difficulty determining if their own oil is *Mild* or *Delicate*, *Medium* or *Robust*. This is partly due to lack of exposure to the wide range of flavors that experienced tasters have.

Style designation is essential for participating within the right category in major olive oil competitions. Oil style descriptors are useful to consumers who favor a particular style of oil for an appropriate food pairing.

Combining Chemical and Sensory Assessment

Agbiolab and Strictly Olive Oil provide a cost-effective service that combines the standard chemical analysis for oil grade with a blind sensory assessment by a recognized olive oil taster. Contact us for details.



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