

Recipes for the WE

Rivals green with envy

An Italian family-owned olive oil company's commitment to picking an

Our coach, which is haring through northern Italy, is packed with young, excited staff from the Carluccio's delicatessen chain. Dressed in designer gear and a rainbow array of Uggs boots, they are on their way to join in the olive harvest in Emilia Romagna and have invited me along.

The Lo Conte family has been producing olive oil for more than a quarter of a century and take pride in it. Some producers let the olives fall naturally, leaving them on the ground for as much as a week before gathering them. The olives oxidise, making for a higher acidity and lower quality oil.

Out here it's a different story. Lo Conte olives have to be pressed the day they leave the tree, so we comb the branches gently with miniature rakes. Showers of tiny green and black torpedoes drop onto nets laid beneath the trees. "Don't step on them!" commands Signor Lo Conte.

We tiptoe around the olives, lifting nets heavy with our harvest and tumble them into crates. Just a few steps across the yard is a tiny oil pressing plant.

Centuries ago, making olive oil was a case of mashing olives and soaking them in water, so that the oil rose to the top. Nowadays, it is not so different. The olives are crushed to a paste, which is then worked to help release the oil, before being mixed with water. The grass green oil is then spun off in a centrifuge.

Later, over dinner, we workers eat bitter fresh olives fried with local sausages and cardoons (a celery-like vegetable) and delicious bowls of white beans simply trickled with the fragrant oil. The newly harvested oil has a herby flavour, with hints of artichoke and almond, and is streets ahead of the dull, industrially produced stuff.

Freshness really does pay off. And so does not treading on the olives.

- Lo Conte new season olive oil (Olio Novello) is currently available from Carluccio's delicatessens nationwide (www.carluccios.com)
- xantheclay@telegraph.co.uk
- www.twitter.com/xanthecooks

The recipes

Broccoli and boconccini salad

Serves 2 or 4 as a starter

A good whack of chilli and garlic, plus some peppery olive oil, make a great foil for the broccoli in this superfood-packed salad. Eat it warm or cold, leaving out the garlic and adding lemon zest if you're taking it to the office in your lunch box.

- 14oz/400g purple sprouting broccoli (more if it needs a lot of trimming)
- 1 mild red chilli, thinly sliced
- 1 clove of garlic, halved lengthways and thinly sliced
- 4 tbsp olive oil
- 4oz/110g boconccini (mozzarella pearls)
- 2 tbsp capers in vinegar, drained

- Steam the broccoli until it's barely tender and still has a bit of bite in it. If you are planning to eat the salad cold, then chill it immediately in a bowl of iced water before draining it.
- Mix the cold or still-warm broccoli with all the other ingredients. Season carefully with salt and pepper.

Red onion and thyme focaccia

Makes enough for 6-8 people

Focaccia, which is rich in olive oil, has a very soft dough that's hard for amateur bakers to knead by hand, so use a tabletop mixer with a dough hook if you have one. Giving the dough just one rise makes the texture more open, but don't rush it by putting it in an airing cupboard or other warm place. Room temperature is hot enough, and gives a better flavour.

- 1lb/450g strong white flour
- 1 tsp salt
- 1x ¼oz/7g sachet easy blend yeast
- 4floz/110ml olive oil
- 5-6 sprigs thyme
- 4 small red onions, each peeled and cut into 8 wedges

- Mix the flour, salt and yeast in a large mixing bowl, ideally one belonging to a tabletop mixer



Rich pickings: white bean and olive oil pu

- Add half the oil and 11floz/300ml warm water, plus the leaves from the thyme.
- Mix with a spoon to a very soft dough, then knead with the dough hook for 3 minutes. (If you knead by hand, it will take at least 10 minutes. The dough will seem impossibly soft,

weekend



By Xanthe Clay

at liquid gold

and pressing its harvest the same day has reaped delicious dividends



Serve with radicchio



Trimmed and cut into
1in/3cm cubes
6 rosemary sprigs

- Heat the oven to 220C/425F/gas mark 7.
- Toss the beetroot and carrots in 3 tbsp olive oil. Spread them out on a baking sheet and roast for half an hour.
- Thread the lamb onto the rosemary sprigs. Turn the meat in the last tablespoonful of olive oil and sprinkle with salt.
- Preheat a heavy frying pan or griddle and seal the lamb on all sides until well browned.
- Put the lamb on top of the vegetables and bake for another 10 minutes or so until done to your liking.

- Serve with a trickle of the herb oil and couscous or bread.

200C/400F/gas mark 6.

- With your fingertips, press down into the pillowy dough to make dimples all over.
- Toss the onions in 1 tbsp of oil and drizzle the rest over the focaccia, letting it run into the dimples.
- Arrange the onions over the top and sprinkle with sea salt flakes.
- Bake for 25 minutes, until golden and cooked through.
- Cool in the tin, covered with a tea towel (this keeps it soft).

Lamb on rosemary skewers with roast winter vegetables

Serves 2-3

At this time of year, the older tougher stalks of rosemary are just right for lamb kebabs. If there's none in the garden, then do as I do and sweet-talk a neighbour. Failing that, use a pack from the supermarket, making the holes with a metal skewer first and pushing the soft stems through. The proportions here are vegetable heavy, so up the quantity of meat if you're feeling protein starved.

1lb/450g small beetroot, washed and cut into wedges
12oz/320g carrots, washed and cut into chunks
4 tbsp olive oil

White bean and olive oil purée

Enough for 4 people

Beans are generally drowned in tomatoes, garlic and bacon, which is a shame. In this dip-cum-spread the subtle, nutty flavour is brought out brilliantly by the olive oil. One to eat with friends, sitting around the kitchen table with a bottle of Italian red.

14oz/400g tin of butter beans, drained and rinsed
Extra virgin olive oil

To serve:

A few slices of ciabatta, toasted and drizzled with olive oil and rubbed with garlic, and some radicchio or red chicory leaves.

- Purée the beans roughly in a food processor, adding enough water to make Greek yogurt consistency.
- Season with salt and pepper, and stir in 1 tbsp olive oil.
- Pile onto a plate and drizzle with olive oil.

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How to make herb olive oil
» telegraph.co.uk/food