



Mealtime Memo

for Child Care

Cooking with Oils



Think about the aisle where the cooking oils are found in your local supermarket. How many types of oils are there? In many cases, there are numerous options to choose from: olive oil, canola oil, coconut oil, walnut oil, and vegetable oil. The question is which oil to choose? Of the many oils, there are four types that are used more frequently than others: canola, vegetable, olive, and tree nut. Knowing the basics about these commonly used oils can help you determine the best types for your recipes.

Canola oil comes from the canola plant, which is a strain of rapeseed. This neutral flavored, all-purpose, monounsaturated oil is considered a heart-healthy oil because it has the lowest amount of saturated fat of all the commonly used oils. Additionally, canola oil has a relatively high smoke point (the temperature at which an oil begins to smoke). Consequently, it can be used when preparing foods that require high temperatures, such as those that require baking, stir-frying, and oven cooking.

Vegetable oil contains a combination of different oils, such as corn, soy, sesame seed, or safflower. It is a mild-tasting, polyunsaturated oil that can be used in many ways, similar to canola oil. Vegetable oil is designed to have a high smoke point so that it can be used to cook at a wide range of temperatures. Additionally, it can be used to prepare a quick salad dressing by mixing one part vegetable oil to two parts vinegar (1:2), with a little garlic powder, salt, and black pepper. Vegetable oil can also be used in combination with other herbs and spices to create marinades for meat, poultry, fish, and vegetables.

Olive oil is a monounsaturated oil that has a pleasant, fruity flavor. Extra-virgin olive oil is first oil pressed from olives and has a low smoke point, so it is ideal for salads or sautéing vegetables that require low heat. Regular olive oil has a more neutral flavor and a higher smoke point; it is a better choice when cooking with high heat.



Finally, there are tree nut oils, such as walnut or almond oil. Tree nut oils are usually cold pressed, which means they are produced at lower temperatures to retain their flavor. The smoke point for these oils varies depending on the type of tree nut. Almond oil has a high smoke point, but walnut oil's smoke point is much lower. Because of their unique flavors, these oils are often used as finishing oils, added at the end of cooking. People who have tree nut allergies (when the body's immune system reacts to the protein in a tree nut) should not use or consume foods with tree nut oils.

When selecting a type of oil to use, keep in mind the temperatures used to prepare the food and the flavor you want the food to have. Also, remember that heat, light, and air can cause oils to become rancid or taste bad. To avoid this choose only one or two types of oil at a time to keep on hand, so they can remain fresh for meal preparation. Additional information on oils can be found in the Oils section of ChooseMyPlate.gov (<http://www.choosemyplate.gov/food-groups/oils.html>).

References

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