

# THE OLIVE FACT FEED

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News and fun facts about the world of EVOO.

## HISTORY OF OLIVE OIL (PART 1)

The history of olive oil is very ancient, and its origins are partly shrouded in mystery.

Its region of origin is most likely to be Asia Minor, in a territory corresponding to today's Turkey, although uncertainty remains and some recent research has placed the authentic origin of the olive in Israel.

This latter was, among others, already present in the Old Testament: in fact, the dove that Noah sees after the Great Deluge has an olive twig in its mouth.

But even the ancient Egyptians certainly knew the olive and its properties, and it seems that the tombs of pharaohs tombs were decorated with this plant, which thus assumed an enormous symbolic value.

The first historical traces of the processing of olives into oil are to be found in Syria (around 5,000 BC), while the Greeks were responsible for its diffusion on a larger scale, leading to the spread of the olive towards the western Mediterranean and, above all, the start of its cultivation in Magna Graecia and Italy.

The olive was of fundamental importance to the ancient Greeks: not only was it the central element of numerous Greek myths, but it was also the sacred plant of the goddess Athena, who, thanks to the olive, had conquered dominion over Attica during a dispute with Poseidon.

In ancient Greece, oil was sold directly by the owners of olive trees, while the first specialised vendors were to arrive only in a later period.

With the advent of the Romans, the olive continued its expansion very rapidly: the plant was cultivated in all territories under the control of Rome, and olive oil also began to be used in the payment of tributes.

It was also in Roman times that there was a first classification of olive oil, which was divided into five different typologies depending on the quality and type of product used.

During the Roman imperial period, it was customary to use olives during dinner, mainly as a starter and at the end of the meal, accompanied by drinks.



## ITALY'S CENTURIES-OLD OLIVE TREES (PART 1)

Italy is one of the largest producers of oil and table olives in the world.

Some olive trees, besides being used to derive these two products, also have an extraordinary historical significance: did you know that many of these trees are thousands of years old? The region richest in centuries-old olive trees is Puglia: there is an area in Salento called Piana degli Ulivi Millenari (Plain of Millenary Olive Trees), where some of the oldest olive trees in Italy are to be found.

In this issue, we are going to discover the first 4!

### 1) **The olive tree of Villastrada - Villastrada (Umbria)**

This is a huge olive tree located in the province of Perugia, close to Castiglione del Lago.

Its trunk has a circumference of 12 metres and it appears to have been planted in the 5th century BC, so it would be about 2,500 years old.

### 2) **The Trenta Zoccoli (Thirty Clogs) olive tree - Pian del Quercione, Massarosa (Tuscany)**

This is one of the most famous olive trees in Italy and is located in the province of Lucca: its trunk has a circumference of 10.6 metres but it is hollow, with a horseshoe shape. It appears to be between 800 and 1,500 years old and its name comes from a tale by writer George Christoph Martini. He writes of having seen 15 olive pickers perched on the tree at the same time, and, consequently, also the 30 clogs (zoccoli) they had been wearing earlier lying at the base of the tree. Since then the olive tree has taken the name we know today.

### 3) **Ulivo della Strega (Witch's Olive Tree) - Magliano in Toscana (Toscana)**

The Ulivo della Strega of Magliano in Toscana is estimated to be about 3,500 years old; it has a circumference of 8.5

metres and a height of just under 10. It is said that when the olive tree was at its most splendid, the forty members of the town's philharmonic orchestra could be sheltered under its branches. It seems that its name derives from the legend that a witch danced around the tree for her satanic rituals every Friday.

### 4) **Olivone di Fibbianello - Semproniano (Toscana)**

The 'Olivone di Fibbianello is a centuries-old olive tree to be found in the province of Grosseto. At its maximum height it measured more than 21 metres: in the town it is recalled that in the best years of that period this tree even managed to produce 800 kg of olives and three sections of ladders were needed to reach the top. Unfortunately, in 1998 unidentified persons set fire to the Olivone. Fortunately, the tree was not completely destroyed and new branches have begun to grow in recent years.

