



Newsletter

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BOOK REVIEW by Gerry Furth-Sides, Media 8
The Passionate Olive: 101 things to do with Olive Oil by Carol Firenze (Ballantine Books, 2005)

Vivacious, beautiful Carol Firenze may be the best advertisement for her own charming and clearly written reference book packed with history and how-to information. The professional member of the AIWF looks like a young professional but is actually a grandmother of four.

Firenze's passion for her lifework of studying and glorifying the olive is serious. She earned her Olive Oil Consultant Certificate from the Italian Culinary Institute in New York and holds a doctorate in education from the University of San Francisco, with a focus on cultural and communicative understanding.

Italian-American Firenze has been personally and professionally enamored by this staple ingredient from the time she was a small child. She shares vivid memories of her family's treasured recipes, including Massimo's Tomato and Potato Side Dish and a Romesco Sauce with toasted almond and hazelnuts from the famed La Via Romana Restaurant in Bordighera, Liguria, her own family's region. But this is only the beginning.

Dr. Firenze recounts history as shaped by the fascinating olive rather than the other way around. It's early use as Mediterranean health aid and as an ingredient in food preparation are secondary to olive oil's role in ancient religious rituals, myth and as an influence to world commerce.

Scholarly in its format, Firenze's book is written with rigorous and detailed academic documentation that includes annotated selected websites and bibliography. Still she makes even the most academic information enticing, such as titling her chapter on the explanation of the different classifications of olive oil, "Virgin or Refined."

Carol reminds us that olive oil, dubbed "liquid gold" by Homer, has been used for food, medicine, magic, beauty, and divine rituals. Baseball star Joe DiMaggio is even said to have soaked his bat in olive oil.

Carol has the father in "My Greek Wedding" with his Windex cure-all beat. She provides formulas for homemade remedies and beauty treatments using olive oil, along with instructions for adding olive oil to dog or cat food for healthy, shiny coats and prevention of hair balls. Olive oil can also be used to remove ticks and lubricate a pet's nose.

Once you have finished using olive oil to clean you the house (dust furniture; remove wax from candleholders, the stains from those pewter chargers and the paint OR correction fluid on your hands and make the tar on the back patio disappear), and your pets are prancing around with renewed vigor all due to olive oil, you can always attend any of the varied special occasions designed around the magic oil. We all know about the ancient Greeks oiling their nude bodies for competition but how about an olive oil-wrestling competition in the village of Kirkpinar, Turkey? This tradition has been high on the social calendar for over 600 years and dates back to the Turks exodus from central Asia. And if you were worried about attending with those dull pearls around your neck or soiled shoes, polish them with olive oil before you leave the house!