

Virgin Oils - Exciting Potentials

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Virgin oils show delicate flavors and at the same time exciting economic potentials in a small market. The rich selection of specialty products available today covers the needs of customers with money to spend. In spite that they are obtained in a simple process there are some difficulties to focus on in the chain from harvest to the consumer. The contribution will highlight the most prominent topics for virgin oils.

Talking about virgin oils we should take a closer look on how virgin oils are defined. In contrast to olive oil we face confusion about naming and characterization of all the other vegetable oils. Apart from the term “virgin” also “cold-pressed”, “first press” and “not-refined” are common on the labels and in the German speaking area the term “nativ” is used synonymously.

The quality of virgin oils is mainly defined by the taste and the smell of the product and these sensory features set virgin oils apart from the tasteless refined oils. The taste can vary from seed-like resembling to legumes and herbs for rapeseed oil or nutty and wood-like for sunflower oil to often bitter taste for linseed oil. Roasted seeds are used for the preparation of pumpkin, argan and the other common nut oils like hazelnut, walnut or macadamia nut oil.

The careful processing of virgin oils with extraction by a screw press and filtration or sedimentation for purification is also an important feature for consumers. However, sometimes it seems that the production of virgin oils is more or less the art to do the simple right. The processing is easy but the producer strongly depends on the quality of the raw material, because he has no chance to improve the oil quality in case of bad seed quality. Thus the most important step in the production chain of virgin oils is to maintain seed quality in the period after harvest until the processing, while extraction of the oilseed and purification has only minor influence on the oil quality.

Nowadays apart from virgin olive oil virgin rapeseed oil has an increasing market share and especially in Switzerland, Austria and Germany this oil becomes more and more popular. Some pitfalls in the production chain of this type of oil and the attempt to improve oil quality by the Rapeseed Oil Award of the German Society of Fat Science are presented.