

An Oil for Life

1 Maria Alcalá of Madrid speaks for many Mediterranean people when she says that “a meal without olive oil would be a bore.” No one knows when the Mediterranean **civilizations initially** fell in love with olives. That occurred before recorded history. However, there is

5 **evidence** that the cultivation of olive trees began in countries around the Mediterranean Sea in **approximately** 4000 B.C., and 2,000 years after that people in the eastern Mediterranean region began to produce oil from olives. The Mediterranean still **accounts** for 99 percent of all world olive oil production.

▲ Olive oil has been produced at this home in Tuscany, Italy, for nearly 1,000 years.

10 From ancient times until today, the basic **process** of producing the oil is the same. First, whole olives are crushed.¹ Then, the **liquid** is separated from the solids. After that, the valuable oil is separated from the water.

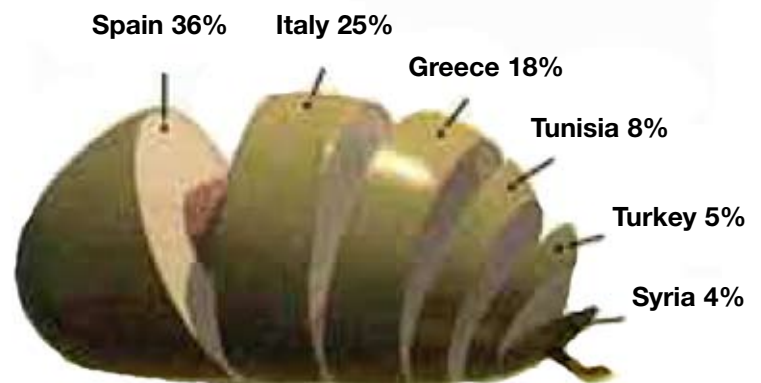
15 Many olive growers maintain their ancient traditions and still harvest the olives by hand. “We . . . harvest in the traditional way,” says Don Celso, an olive farmer from Tuscany, Italy. “It would be less expensive to do it with machines, but it’s

20 more a social thing. Twenty people come to help with the harvest, and we pay them in oil.”

¹ When you **crush** something, you break it into pieces by applying pressure.

Today 99% of the world’s olive oil ► comes from the Mediterranean region.

Leading olive oil producers (% of world production)





▲ Rows of young olive trees line the hills of Andalusia in Spain, the world's leading olive oil producer.

The Benefits of Olive Oil

- 25 Olive oil has had a variety of uses through its long history. In ancient times olive oil was used as money and as medicine. It was even used during war—heated up and dropped down on **attackers**. It is still used in religious **ceremonies**. It is great for protecting the freshness of fish and cheese. There are even olive oil lamps and olive oil soaps.²
- 30 One important study showed that Mediterranean people have the lowest rate of heart disease among Western nations. This is partly **associated** with their frequent use of olive oil. Other studies have shown that food cooked in olive oil is healthier, and that eating olive oil twice a day reduces women's risk of getting breast cancer.³ The world is
- 35 beginning to understand its benefits, and olive oil is no longer an unusual sight at dinner tables outside the Mediterranean region. The olive oil producing countries now sell large amounts of olive oil to countries in Europe, Asia, Africa, and North and South America.



- 40 Olive oil enhances the lives of people everywhere. Its benefits, recently confirmed by science, were already understood in ancient times. Mediterranean people are happy to share their secret with the world.

² **Soap** is a material used for cleaning the hands, the body, etc.

³ **Cancer** is an extremely serious disease in which cells in the body grow rapidly in an uncontrolled way.

◀ A careful pouring of olive oil turns a plate of sheep cheese into a work of art.