COOKING OIL GUIDE

Whole Lifecycle NUTRITION

TURNING UP THE HEAT

Oil is a key ingredient in any home cook's kitchen. It's used in everything from sautéing to roasting to frying to marinades, and is a main ingredient in dressings and sauces. The addition of oil can help you achieve browning on protein or crispy edges on vegetables. With so many choices, what are the crucial differences between all of the oils, and is there one best choice? Use this guide to differentiate between the most commonly used oils and determine which one is most appropriate based on your specific need.



THE SMOKE POINT

The smoke point of an oil is essentially the temperature at which an oil will start to produce smoke when it is being heated. Different oils have different smoke points depending on the type of fat and whether or not it is refined or unrefined. For a long time, smoke point was used as an indicator of which oils were better for cooking (i.e. the higher the smoke point, the better the oil for high heat smoking) but the latest research tell us that we actually don't need to be so focused on smoke point anymore.



COOKING OIL GUIDE

Whole Lifecycle NUTRITION

HEAT STABLE OILS



The most important indicator of what oils can be used when cooking is actually something called "oxidative stability" or how much an oil can resist breaking down when reacting with oxygen.

Research shows that oils with the highest "oxidative stability" are the best to cook with because they form fewer harmful compounds than less stable oils when heated. So, what oils are the most stable? Heart-healthy oils high in monounsaturated fats with lots of antioxidants such as olive oil, avocado oil, and peanut oil are very stable when heated, regardless of their smoke points. Saturated fats such as coconut oil are also very stable when heated but not recommended for everyday use since saturated fats are not good to consume in large quantities.

Vegetable oils higher in polyunsaturated fats such as rice bran oil, sunflower oil, and soybean oil are less stable and form more toxic compounds when heated so are not recommended when cooking.

RCanola oil is high in monounsaturated fats yet has low oxidative stability so is also not ideal for cooking.

BOTTOM LINE

Remember that oils, while useful in cooking, are still recommended in small amounts relative to foundational health-promoting foods like fruits, vegetables, whole grains and legumes. Use them as a flavor enhancer in home-cooked meals instead of considering oils a major source of nutrients.

COOKING OIL GUIDE

Whole Lifecycle NUTRITION

	OIL TYPE	FLAVOR	USE/NOTES	PRICE*
HIGH HEAT- 400°F AND ABOVE	AVOCADO	mild avocado flavor	Frying; high-heat roasting.	$$
	PEANUT	strong peanut flavor	Frying; Asian stir-fries, sauces and marinades; high-heat roasting.	$$$
	GRAPE-SEED	neutral flavor	Can be used for low to medium heat cooking or used in salad dressings if you want a neutral flavor.	$$
	EXTRA VIRGIN OLIVE OIL	notable olive flavor	The "workhorse" oil; sauté or roast vegetables, pan-fry, use in homemade salad dressings. Olive oils labeled "refined," "pure" or "light" olive oil can also be used but will have fewer antioxidants so are not quite as stable as EVOO.	$ - $$$$
MEDIUM HEAT- 300°F-400°F	SESAME	strong sesame flavor & aroma	Used in Asian dishes, such as stir-fries. Opt for unrefined toasted sesame oil if available.	$$$
	VEGETABLE/CANOLA	neutral flavor	Multi-purpose oils; used in baked goods like muffins and quick breads; the most affordable choice, not ideal for high heat cooking but fine for baking.	$
	COCONUT (UNREFINED)	mild coconut flavor	Solid at room temperature and liquid when heated; used as a substitute for butter in vegan baked goods, or in cuisines that pair well with coconut.	$$
LOW HEAT	TOASTED WALNUT/FLAXSEED	nutty flavor	Most toasted nut and seed oils are considered to be very delicate and are best used in cold preparations such as salad dressings or sauces.	$$

***Note:** $ - less than $0.50/oz $$ - $0.50 - $1.00/oz $$$ - $1.00+/oz*