

Life Outside the Martini Glass

Green olives stuffed with pimento add a sour and salty taste to a variety of foods

By Justin Holbrock

Green olives stuffed with pimento are best known for their position at the bottom of a martini glass. This olive, however, is more than a complement to a classic cocktail.



The Spanish Manzanilla olive originated in Seville, Spain and is one of the most abundant olives in the world.

Photo by Justin Holbrock

The United States has adopted olives with pimento, such as Spanish Manzanillas, in a variety of ways: a savory tapenade for bruschetta, a quick snack and as a salad topping.

When eaten fresh from the tree, green olives are extremely bitter. The most common way to get rid of the unpleasant taste is to first soak the olives in a weak alkali solution and then rinse and package the olives with brine, according to a Glencoe/McGraw-Hill world food booklet.

A pimento is a bright red, heart-shaped pepper, which can be used for many different purposes such as mixed into cheese or dried for paprika.

While stuffed green olives are known for their sour and salty taste, they also have an important nutritional benefit. Stuffed green olives contain monounsaturated fats, which can help reduce bad cholesterol levels and lower the risk of heart disease and stroke, according to the American Heart Association.

Monounsaturated fats also provide nutrients to help develop and maintain the body's cells, also according to the American Heart Association.

This nutritional benefit is overshadowed, though, by the potential health risks. Consuming six stuffed green olives provides almost 20 percent of the recommended daily sodium allowance of 2,300 milligrams. As the Harvard School of Public Health points out, high sodium intake increases blood pressure, which can lead to heart disease. The olives can also attribute to weight gain because even though they contain monounsaturated fats, they still contain fat calories.

In terms of production, Spain, Greece, Italy, Turkey and Morocco lead the world, in that order, according to a 2014 report from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations Statistics Division. The report also shows the U.S. as the 20th leading producer out of the 41 countries listed.

Although California is small in the global olive industry, it's significant in the U.S with the state producing more than 95 percent of the olives grown in this country, according to the California Olive Committee.

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