

More than salad dressing and frying fish: The culinary uses of olives and olive oil in Australia 1865 – 1949

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Contrary to popular belief olive oil was fairly common in many colonial kitchens ... While olive oil was sold, used and marketed for medicinal purposes by chemists it was predominantly used for culinary purposes, and sold in local grocers' shops ... The volumes [for sale] being advertised – pints and quarts by the dozen or by the gallon give a strong indication that the olive oil was widely used long before the 1950s post-WW2 migration.

The 'good oil' on olive oil in early Sydney

*Philippa Vaughan, The Cook and the Curator 2019*¹

Sometimes referred to by its source name (Lucca or Florence oil, for example) or simply as 'salad oil', references to olive oil appear in journals, household accounts, newspapers and recipes throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Eat Your History

*Jacqui Newling 2015*²

Olive oil's chief uses were in salad dressings and for frying fish ... Despite the influx of Southern European migrants after WWII ... olive oil for most Australians was something you bought from the chemist as a remedy for earache.

1870 First commercial olive oil production

Jan O'Connell

*Australian food timeline*³

I put my hand up as one of those, and a self-professed Australian food historian at that, who bought the line that olive oil was not available outside of chemists till after the arrival of Italians and Greeks post World War Two. So Vaughan's and Newling's statements both brought me up short and piqued my interest.

I set out to investigate, my particular interest being in how olive oil was presented in the public arena through press and cookery books. Was it only as a salad dressing or medium for frying as O'Connell has it? And what of the olive itself, was it only a garnish?

I limited the investigation to the period 1865 – the year of the first extant published recipes using olive oil (called salad oil but see Newling above) – to 1949 - the year before the 'the influx of Southern European migrants after WWII'.⁴ My sources were newspapers and magazines accessed through *Trove*, the digital library managed by the National Library of Australia, and Australian cookery books published over that time drawn from my collection. There were 300 recipes

¹ Vaughan, Philippa, 'The 'good oil' on olive oil in early Sydney', *The Cook and the Curator* 17 January 2019 accessed at [The 'good oil' on olive oil in early Sydney | The Cook and the Curator | Sydney Living Museums](#)

² Newling, Jacqui, *Eat Your History: stories and recipes from Australian kitchens*, Sydney Living Museums and NewSouth Publishing 2015 p86

³ '1870 First commercial olive oil production' *Australian food timeline*, Jan O'Connell, accessed at [Australian food timeline - first successful olive oil production](#)

⁴ The term 'Southern Europeans' commonly means Italians and Greeks with whom the olive and olive oil are linked in popular food culture in Australia. There were Italians and Greeks living Australia from at least the 1850s gold rush but there was a significant increase in these and other European nationalities post World War Two. Italians were by far the largest group of migrants, some 300,000 arriving in the years 1941- 61. Van Reyk, Paul, *True to the Land. A History of Food in Australia*, Reaktion, 2019 p158

published of which 40 were contributions from correspondents or in response to specific recipe inquiries from correspondents. I reviewed 37 cookery books. Appendix 1 lists the books.

A brief history of the olive and olive oil in Australia

The first olive tree planted in the colony of New South Wales was that brought by Gordon Suttor in 1800 as part of a consignment from the naturalist Sir Joseph Banks.⁵ John Macarthur, 'soldier, entrepreneur and pastoralist',⁶ planted an olive tree on his Elizabeth Farm property in 1805 which still stands.⁷ Macarthur was interested in the commercial possibilities for the olive in Australia. In 1814 he and his two sons travelled in the south of France which gave them 'the opportunity seeing and studying the whole practice of the Culture of the Vine and the Olive, and the making the Wine and the Oil.'⁸ In 1831 Elizabeth Macarthur wrote: 'We have made a small quantity of olive oil and we have had capers for our boiled mutton.'⁹

The 1830 edition of the *Australian Almanac* informed the cultivator 'Olives are propagated by seed, layers, or cuttings, they delight in sandy soil; they should be transplanted in August or September; they are in season from December until March.'¹⁰ In 1851 Thomas Shepherd's Darling Nursery on the outskirts of Sydney advertised olive trees for sale.¹¹ Interest in cultivating the olive was evidenced by this growth in their local availability and references to it in publications. Thomas Shepherd (snr.), first nurseryman in the colony and founder of the Darling Nursery in his fourth *Lecture on The Horticulture of New South Wales* discusses the propagation and cultivation of the olive.¹² Thomas Shepherd (jnr, his son) gave particular attention to only two plants in his 1851 *Catalogue* – the orange and the olive. Of the olive he wrote:

The suitability of this climate (In Sydney) for the successful cultivation of the olive is beyond a doubt; already small quantities of oil and pickled olives of very superior quality have been manufactured,¹³ and there is little doubt that the quantity will yearly increase ... Our imports of olive oil and fruit amount to a considerable amount yearly, which would long before this have been rendered unnecessary had the colonists been more enterprising in this matter ... It is extremely desirable that Colonists who may have it in the power should take up this important subject, which, if carried out with spirit cannot fail to prove highly remunerative, not only to the individual immediately concerned, but to the Colony at large, The formation of an active

⁵ Spennemann, D. H. R., *Centenary of Olive Processing at Charles Sturt University*. Charles Sturt University, Faculty of Science and Agriculture Charles Sturt University 2000 p1

⁶ 'John MacArthur' Australian Dictionary of Biography accessed October 2023 [Biography - John Macarthur - Australian Dictionary of Biography \(anu.edu.au\)](https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/macarthur-john)

⁷ 'An oily business' *The Cook and the Curator* 23 March 2017 accessed in October 2023 at [An oily business | The Cook and the Curator | Sydney Living Museums](https://www.sylvestermuseum.com.au/2017/03/an-oily-business/)

⁸ 'Sibella Macarthur Onslow 'Some Early Records of the Macarthurs of Camden'' <https://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks13/1302011h.html>

⁹ '12th May 1831, from Sydney. (SLNSW, ML A2906: Mrs John Macarthur – Journal and Correspondence 1789-1840) An oily business' *The Cook and the Curator* 23 March 2017 accessed in October 2023 at [An oily business | The Cook and the Curator | Sydney Living Museums](https://www.sylvestermuseum.com.au/2017/03/an-oily-business/)

¹⁰ *Australian Almanack for the Year of Our Lord 1830* p.122 accessed at [January 1830\) \(nla.gov.au\)](https://nla.gov.au/nla:AAN1830)

¹¹ Shepherd, Thomas, *Catalogue of plants cultivated at the Darling Nursery, Sydney, New South Wales ... to which is added a few practical remarks on the cultivation of the orange and the olive in Australia* 1851 pp.27-28 accessed at [Catalogue of plants cultivated at the Darling Nursery, Sydney, New South Wales ...: to which is added a few practical remarks on the cultivation of the orange and the olive in Australia \(nla.gov.au\)](https://nla.gov.au/nla:AAN1851)

¹² Shepherd, Thomas, *Lectures on the Horticulture of New South Wales Delivered at the Mechanics' School of Arts* 1835 p.65 [Lectures on the horticulture of New South Wales : delivered at the Mechanics School of Arts, Sydney \(nla.gov.au\)](https://nla.gov.au/nla:AAN1835)

¹³ He may be referring to 'olives grown and preserved at Irrawang', Australian Olives, *The Sydney Morning Herald* 15 November 1850 p.2 [https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/12922602?](https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/12922602?fromOpen=1)

plantation is a simple and inexpensive undertaking, the land requires little preparation, and until the trees have commenced produce, may be used for other crops.¹⁴

By the end of the 1800s all the colonies had planted olive trees except Tasmania. The first plants introduced into South Australia were imported by Mr. William Giles, Manager of the South Australian Company in 1844.¹⁵ Benedictine monks planted olive trees at New Norcia in Western Australia in 1846.¹⁶ The monastery's oil won a silver medal at the Franco-British Exhibition of 1908.¹⁷ Olives were planted at Dookie Agricultural College, Victoria in 1870¹⁸, at Westbrook Station, Queensland, in 1877¹⁹ and at the Wagga Experiment Farm in 1891 by the Department of Agriculture in New South Wales.²⁰ In 1943 Jacob Friedman started planting what is still today the largest plantation in Australia at the foot of the northern end of the Grampian range near Horsham, Victoria.²¹

Surprisingly, the first commercially successful olive oil enterprise began in 1870 at Adelaide Gaol, with prisoners as labourers. Set up by the Sheriff William Boothby as a way to keep prisoners occupied, after five or six years it began extracting oil, which was sold for between ten and twelve shillings a gallon. The first large-scale commercial olive enterprise, the Stonyfell Olive Company, was established by Sydney Clark and William Mair at Magill in 1873.²²

The 16 November 1850 edition of the *Sydney Morning Herald* described the different pressings and what each produced by way of culinary or other value. 'The first pressure, called the cold pressure, yields the best or virgin oil. For the second pressing, the same bags of paste have either been plunged into boiling water, or they have been spread out and boiling water has been poured into them. This yield may also be good for table oil, but is not so fruity as virgin oil. A third pressing of the oilcake, or marc, resulting from the two preceding, takes place remotely, and after a soaking in very hot water. The yield from this is good for lamp-oil and for soap.'²³

¹⁴ Shepherd, Thomas, Catalogue of plants cultivated at the Darling Nursery, Sydney, New South Wales ... to which is added a few practical remarks on the cultivation of the orange and the olive in Australia 1851 p.47 accessed at [Catalogue of plants cultivated at the Darling Nursery, Sydney, New South Wales ...: to which is added a few practical remarks on the cultivation of the orange and the olive in Australia \(nla.gov.au\)](http://nla.gov.au/nla:gov.au)

¹⁵ 'Olive Growing', *The Australian* 20 April 1923 p.6 accessed at [20 Apr 1923 - Olive Growing. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](http://trove.nla.gov.au)

¹⁶ Reichel Karen and Burr, Michael *Extra Virgin: An Australian Companion to Olives and Olive Oil* Wakefield Press 1997 p.21

¹⁷ 'A Brief History of Olives in Australia' **Fruit Tree Lane** accessed October 1923 at [A Brief History of Olives in Australia - Fruit Tree Lane](http://fruit-treelane.com.au)

¹⁸ Reichel Karen and Burr, Michael *Extra Virgin: An Australian Companion to Olives and Olive Oil* Wakefield Press 1997 p.21

¹⁹ Reichel Karen and Burr, Michael *Extra Virgin: An Australian Companion to Olives and Olive Oil* Wakefield Press 1997 p.22

²⁰ Spennemann, D. H. R., *Centenary of Olive Processing at Charles Sturt University. Charles Sturt University, Faculty of Science and Agriculture* Charles Sturt University 2000 p10.

²¹ 'A Brief History of Olives in Australia' **Fruit Tree Lane** accessed October 1923 at [A Brief History of Olives in Australia - Fruit Tree Lane](http://fruit-treelane.com.au)

²² Reichel Karen and Burr, Michael *Extra Virgin: An Australian Companion to Olives and Olive Oil* Wakefield Press 1997 p.11

²³ Australian Olives, *Sydney Morning Herald* 16 November 1850 p.2 [16 Nov 1850 - AUSTRALIAN OLIVES. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](http://trove.nla.gov.au)

Imported olives and olive oil

first reference to importing olive oil I found was in 12 February 1804 when the New South Wales Commissary Office advertised an auction of goods including 26 Gallons of olive oil.²⁴ In 1813 the House of Joseph Inch had for sale French Olives²⁵, and Salad Oil.²⁶ In 1822 Mrs M. Sargent had 'fine fresh olives' for sale.²⁷ In 1896 the value of imported olive oils was from £15,000 to £20,000 per annum.²⁸ In 1930 249,511 gallons was imported valued at £73,970.²⁹ As late in the time frame for this investigation as 1948 Pitches of Frankston advertised 'just landed from Greece a splendid consignment of excellent clear, mild pure Olive Oil.'³⁰

The uses of the olive and olive oil

Edward Abbott in his 1864 cookery book *The English and Australian Cookery Book: Cookery for the Many, as well as the Upper Ten Thousand - by an Australian Aristologist*, writes of the olive: 'Olive is the fruit of the tree with the same name . It is pickled for use; and the olive pressed, produces the valuable vegetable oil so much used'.³¹ Abbott has six recipes using salad oil which I think I am safe in assuming is the 'vegetable oil' derived from olives : French Salad (p.66), Onion Salad p.66), Frying Fish (p.96), Egg Balls (p.101), Spanish Peas Stewed with Oil (p.234), and Haman's Fritters (p.256) where the recipe calls for Florence oil, another sobriquet for olive oil.³² What's particularly interesting to me here in terms of this article is that at this nascent moment in its colonial culinary history olive oil had already escaped the salad bowl to other areas of the colonial table viz Egg Balls, Peas Stewed with Oil, and Haman's Fritters. This remained the case 1865 – 1949.

Table olives – home pickled

How often has the writer heard in his old home as the elderly visitors sat down to a well-laden supper table — 'But where are the olives?' And a large tureen of pickled olives soon made its appearance; and so popular were they that the bowl had frequently to be refilled. A few, but only a few would be of the opinion that it was an acquired taste. Those pickled olives were not purchased at a store, but grown and prepared upon the small estate.³³

²⁴ 'Commissary's Office', *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser* 12 February 1804 p1 accessed at [12 Feb 1804 - Classified Advertising - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

²⁵ 'There must be no misconception as to the name French or Spanish as it applies to olives; it does not refer to the country from which they are derived, but simple serves to indicate that they are taken from the tree at a particular time in accordance with the habit observed in the respective countries'. Philip Musket, *The Art of Living in Australia* Eyre and Spottiswoode, London.1893 p.67

²⁶ 'House of Joseph Inch', *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser* 17 July 1813 p.2 accessed at [17 Jul 1813 - Classified Advertising - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#) Salad oil is olive oil.

²⁷ 'Mrs M. Sargent' *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser* 25 October 1822 p.2 accessed at [25 Oct 1822 - Classified Advertising - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

²⁸ 'Olive Oil Industry' *The Week* 26 June 1896 p.3 accessed at [26 Jun 1896 - Olive Oil Industry. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

²⁹ 'Olive Oil', *Chronicle* 31 July 1930 p.20 accessed at [31 Jul 1930 - OLIVE OIL - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

³⁰ 'Olive Oil', *Standard* 28 August 1948 p.10 accessed at [26 Aug 1948 - OLIVE OIL - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

³¹ Abbott, *Australian Cookery Book* p.41

³² Abbott, Edward, *The English and Australian Cookery Book: Cookery for the Many, as well as the Upper Ten Thousand - by an Australian Aristologist*, Sampson Low, Son, and Marston, London, 1864.

³³ 'The Olive' *The Mount Barker Courier and Onkaparinga and Gumeracha Advertiser* p.6 accessed at [18 Aug 1949 - THE OLIVE - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

One of the domestic uses of olives is home pickling/curing as the quote above shows.³⁴ The earliest description of preserving olives was published in the feature on Olives mentioned above published by *Sydney Morning Herald* 16 November 1850.³⁵

Thomas Shepherd in his 1851 *Catalogue* described the method:

Pickled olives are prepared by steeping the fruit in a lye composed of water with a small quantity of quick-lime, and should be changed every twenty four hours for about three weeks, when pure water only, must be used for a few days, after which they are ready for bottling in salt and water, to make them fit for use.³⁶

The Catalogue would have had very limited distribution, however, being only available to those purchasing it. A more detailed recipe was given by Sam Davenport in the 25 March 1871 edition of the *Adelaide Observer*, received he says from Mr Barlee, Chief Secretary of Western Australia. The quantities of the ingredients and the method described suggest that the recipe was for the home pickler.

Recipe for Pickling Green Olives

The lye is to be made as follows:—Take three lbs. of fresh wood-ashes, six ounces of fresh quick-lime, six quarts of cold water, mix well, and boil gently for 30 minutes, keeping it well stirred. When the olive is full grown, but quite green, gather carefully the quantity wanted, without bruising (of the largest kind), and place them in a clean vessel (not iron) pure from any greasy matter, and when the lye is cooled to about 150° Fahrenheit pour sufficient on the olives to well cover them; soak for about 30 hours. Then pour off the lye entirely (covering the vessel to prevent the berries running out), and rinse the berries with fresh cold water, and for three days keep them in cold water, changing the water two or three times each day.³⁷

Then, having prepared the pickle (salt and water) of about the strength that will float an egg (the better plan is to boil the water and pour it on the salt, leaving it till quite cold), and having clean bottles, thoroughly dried, put in the berries, carefully selecting them of equal sizes for each bottle, shaking but not pressing them down in each bottle, and pour into each bottle sufficient pickle to cover the olives, leaving a space in each of about an inch from the cork, which should be good and well fitting. Cover with pieces of bladder, well tied on and secured from the air with some wax of black rosin and beeswax.³⁸

³⁴ Edward Abbott's 1864 cookery book *The English and Australian Cookery Book: Cookery for the Many, as well as the Upper Ten Thousand - by an Australian Aristologist* p.41

³⁵ Australian Olives, *Sydney Morning Herald* 16 November 1850 p.2 [16 Nov 1850 - AUSTRALIAN OLIVES. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

³⁶ Shepherd, Thomas, *Catalogue of plants cultivated at the Darling Nursery, Sydney, New South Wales ... to which is added a few practical remarks on the cultivation of the orange and the olive in Australia* 1851 p.48 accessed at [Catalogue of plants cultivated at the Darling Nursery, Sydney, New South Wales ...: to which is added a few practical remarks on the cultivation of the orange and the olive in Australia \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

³⁷ Shepherd, Thomas, *Catalogue of plants cultivated at the Darling Nursery, Sydney, New South Wales ... to which is added a few practical remarks on the cultivation of the orange and the olive in Australia* 1851 p. 47 accessed at [Catalogue of plants cultivated at the Darling Nursery, Sydney, New South Wales ...: to which is added a few practical remarks on the cultivation of the orange and the olive in Australia \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

³⁸ 'The Olive', *Adelaide Observer* 25 March 1871 p.9 accessed at [25 Mar 1871 - THE OLIVE. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

I found 12 other recipes for home pickling of olives in newspapers the last being published in the March 1949 edition of the *Western Mail*.³⁹ None of the cookery books reviewed carried instructions for home pickling.

Extracting Olive Oil

As with pickling, making olive oil is usually left out of a discussion about the culinary use of the olive in the home. And yet there was interest in this. In 1822 at the British Society of Arts reward ceremony two new rewards were announced

Olive Oil — to the person who shall in the year 1824,—5,—and 6, manufacture and import the finest specimen of oil, not less than ten gallons, the produce of olives grown in any British colony, in Africa, or New South Wales ;—the Gold Medal.

For the next greatest quantity, not less than six gallons ;—the Silver Medal, Specimens of the oil, not less than two quarts, together with satisfactory certificates to be produced to the Society, on or before the last Tuesday in February 1825,—6,—or 7.⁴⁰

John MacArthur was in attendance and was presented with a medal for his wool producing. He hadn't as yet produced his own oil and would not for another nine years, but I wouldn't be surprised if he had mentioned that he was looking to have a domestic pressing prompting the Society to announce the two new awards. Unfortunately, I could find no record of whether and how these rewards proceeded.

In May 1882, the *West Australian* published a description of the process of home extraction of oil from 'Olivia':

How to Make Olive Oil

To the Editor of the West Australian.

Sir. - In your issue of last week a correspondent signing himself "Brunswick" asks for an easy recipe for making olive oil. Perhaps the following very simple method witnessed by myself in Adelaide may be of use to him. In the first place, a box (say, for instance, an empty brandy-case) is thoroughly cleaned and fitted with a leather spout. Inside this box is placed a smaller one, perforated with holes at both sides and bottom, and in this are placed the olives, which must be picked on a fine day, perfectly ripe, black, and inclined to be shrivelled. On top of the mass is placed a lid, fitting inside the smaller box, with some heavy weight above. The pressure (with the heat) gradually presses down the olives, the juice of which passes through the perforated holes of the small box, flows from the spout of the larger one, and runs into a dish placed there for that purpose. At first the liquid presents a dirty black-looking appearance, but after a time the sediment sinks and clear oil remains on the top, which is skimmed off. This forms the pure oil. The berries are again boiled and skimmed, and the second skimming forms the indifferent oil used for machinery, etc. Hoping that this very primitive style of olive oil making may assist the wishes of " Brunswick "and olive-oil makers in general.

I am, Sir, yours, etc.,

OLIVIA.⁴¹

³⁹'Pickling Olives', The Western Mail 17 March 1949 p.55 accessed at [17 Mar 1949 - PICKLING OLIVES - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](https://trove.nla.gov.au)

⁴⁰ The *Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser* 29 November 1822 p.2 accessed at [29 Nov 1822 - Sydney. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](https://trove.nla.gov.au)

⁴¹ 'How to Make Olive Oil', The *West Australian* 9 May 1882 p.3 accessed at [09 May 1882 - HOW TO MAKE OLIVE OIL. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](https://trove.nla.gov.au)

Even simpler is the method described In May 1919 by 'H':

Crush ripe olives in a grain-crusher, and press with a screw or other press lined, with sacking. Skim the resulting liquid for the oil, and strain the oil with a funnel shaped flannel bag ,Other plans will suggest themselves. I have seen two Italians knead the |whole fruit in a bag placed on a plank over a tub.⁴²

There were a further 14 articles about home extraction post 1919 the last being in the *Chronicle* in 1935.⁴³As with pickling none of the cookery books dealt with making olive oil at home.

Olive Oil as Salad Dressing

Olive oil's chief uses were in salad dressings and for frying fish.
Australian food timeline ⁴⁴

Just 50 of the 300 recipes I reviewed used olive oil in a salad dressing. In some the dressing was made and then poured over the salad.

Salad Dressing.—One pinch of salt, one of pepper, two tablespoonfuls of olive oil one of tarragon vinegar, and one teaspoonful of mustard. Take the ingredient in the above proportions and beat them smooth.⁴⁵

In others the dressing was made directly in the salad each ingredient being added separately and then whole of the salad then being tossed.

For dressing vegetables— beans, peas, cabbage, haricots, limas— cooked in the ordinary way, drained, and then put back into the saucepan with one tablespoon of oil, pepper, salt, and stirred for a few minutes, are delicious.⁴⁶

In both cases the dressing was varied by adding the mashed yolk of a boiled egg, cream, or condensed milk. Some recipes call for chopped olives to be added.

Other culinary uses of olives and olive oil

There were , then, 250 published recipes in newspapers, journals and cookery books for using olives and olive oil in ways other than as salad dressing. The argument can be made that recipes written by a newspaper or magazine staffer or in cookery books are no guarantee of practice in the home. I acknowledge that, but they demonstrate that there was a rich field of inventiveness to which the home cook could turn when tired of making yet another salad with that bottle of olive oil in the pantry or unsure what to do with the table olives that an eccentric acquaintance had pressed upon them.

⁴² 'Olive Oil' Kitchen and Pantry, *The Argus* 21 May 1919 p.12 accessed at [21 May 1919 - KITCHEN AND PANTRY. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

⁴³'Making Olive Oil at Home', *Chronicle* 4 July 1935 p.11 accessed at [04 Jul 1935 - MAKING OLIVE OIL AT HOME - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

⁴⁴ '1870 First commercial olive oil production' Australian food timeline, Jan O'Connell, accessed at [Australian food timeline - first successful olive oil production](#)

⁴⁵ 'Salad Dressing', *The Queenslander* 26 June 1875 p.7 accessed at [26 Jun 1875 - Recipes from "The Queen" - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

⁴⁶'Olive Oil Cookery', *The Daily Telegraph* 11 April 1917 p.6 accessed at [11 Apr 1917 - "OLIVE OIL COOKERY." - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

Olives were chopped and added to a Savoury Mould of Rabbit, pulped to make a spread for Olive and Bacon sandwiches, sliced and atop Cheese Loaf squares, stuffed with a paste of eggs chutney and anchovies for Farced Olives, with diced chicken in Chicken in a Ring cake, in Olive Stuffing for veal or lamb. Among the recipes for using olive oil were a marinade for Roast Pig's Liver, sauce for Beefsteak with Olives, preserving Yeast, mixed with chutney In a sauce for Grillade of Chicken, in the batter for Apple Fritters, in a paste to stuff Savory Eggs, the base for Mayonnaise, in the pastry for Savoury Pie, in Paeila (sic), in an Olive and Egg Sauce, as the preservative in Splendid Pickle, in the batter for a Rumanian Cake, in the batter for an Almond Delight biscuit, lubricating peanuts for Peanut Butter, and in Gazpacho. The links for these recipes or the book reference are at Appendix 2.

Green Olive and Bacon Sandwich Filling

½ cup chopped and stoned green olives, ½ cup chopped bacon, ½ cup chopped nut meats, ½ cup mayonnaise. Mix ingredients together; add salt to taste. Butter bread slightly, using brown or white bread. Spread olive mixture about one-eighth inch thick on half the slices. Cover with remaining slice. Cut into desired shapes.⁴⁷

Peanut Butter

Put shelled peanuts in a shallow dish in a warm oven with the door slightly ajar. When the hulls are loosened put the nuts in a bag and knead well with the hands until all husks are removed. Grind the nuts, then put this nutmeat into a double saucepan, with water in the under saucepan only. Add a little olive oil and salt to the nutmeat, stir well, and allow to cook 3 or 4 hours.⁴⁸

There were recipes for pasta: Macaroni with Tomato, Steak and Macaroni, Macaroni or Spaghetti - the real Italian method, Italian Method for Making Spaghetti, Raveola (sic), A Spaghetti Symphony – recipe verbatim from Mario Faggion, proprietor of the Florentine Café, Scalloped Macaroni. The links for these recipes or the book reference are at Appendix 2.

Italian Recipe for Making Spaghetti

Top rib of beef (with bone or without), two tablespoonsful pure Italian olive oil, few heads of garlic inserted in meat. Put in saucepan. Meat to be braised with oil, when oil is warm; when meat is well browned, take out and lay on plate on stove. Brown finely-cut onions. Place meat again in saucepan with onions, a dessertspoonful of tomato extract (to be diluted with warm water beforehand); add salt, cayenne, pepper and cloves, and let simmer until meat is cooked. When meat is half cooked, put three-parts of large saucepan of water on fire and when toiling put in 1½ b. to lb. macaroni, and add salt to taste. Macaroni will take 152 minutes (sic – 15-20?) to cook. Strain macaroni, and then put in dish, and add gravy from meat, and mix with two forks. Add and mix grated cheese. Note. —When tomato extract is not available a larger quantity of strong tomato sauce may be used as substitute. Quantity of meat according to number of persons.⁴⁹

Other culinary uses of olives and olive oil – correspondent generated recipes

Proportionally more recipes here were for salads than they were in the overall recipes I reviewed. Among the recipes that used olive oil other than in a salad were: decoration for a Fish Aspic, in Lentil Soup, braising onions for a Fish Soup, pulped for an Olive Sandwich spread, stuffed with

⁴⁷ 'Green Olive and Bacon Sandwich Filling', *Queensland Times* 23 September 1935 p.4 [23 Sep 1935 - GREEN OLIVE AND BACON SANDWICH FILLING. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

⁴⁸ 'Peanut Butter' A Recipe, *Daily Advertiser* 16 August 1937 p.2 [16 Aug 1937 - A RECIPE - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

⁴⁹ 'Italian Recipe for Spaghetti', *The Albury Baner and Wodonga Express* 17 October 1919 p.14 accessed at [17 Oct 1919 - ITALIAN RECIPE FOR MAKING SPAGHETTI. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

cheese, mixed with curry powder to make a paste for Indian Chicken, a canape with sliced Salmagundi, for a garnish on slices of Cheese Loaf, chopped and mixed in a Prawn Salad, and whole stoned olives in a Rabbit Saluri. The recipes, links and book references are Appendix 3.

Rabbit Saluri.

One rabbit, 1 bay leaf, teasp. salt, 2 tablesp butter, 2 tablesp flour, 2 teasp capers, tablesp. Worcestershire sauce, sliced onion, stalk celery, tablesp oil, 2 cups water, 10 olives. Clean and joint rabbit and place in pan. Brush with oil. Add onion, celery and bay leaf and cook for 30 minutes. Lift meat from pan. Add butter and flour and cook till a rich brown. Add the hot water, stir well and add other ingredients. When smooth, lay the rabbit in the pan again. Cover closely and simmer for 40-60 minutes. Contributed by Miss S. M. Dunstone⁵⁰

Other culinary uses of olives and olive oil – frying

And, yes, olive oil was used for frying but not just for fish: there are recipes for using it with Haricot or Lima Beans, in a Spanish Omelette, and Chicken among others.

To Cook Chicken

Cut up an uncooked fowl, and fry the pieces in olive oil with a bruised clove of garlic, pepper, salt, and a bundle of sweet herbs. Take three tablespoonfuls of the oil used in frying the fowl, add some minced mushrooms, a little shallot and parsley, also finely minced, a glass of white wine, as much stock (free from fat), pepper and salt to taste. Let the sauce boil a few minutes, dish up the pieces of fowl, pour the sauce over, and serve.⁵¹

Two cookery writers promoted its use for all frying:

If olive oil were used instead of lard to fry things in, half the harmful results of the frying pan would be done away with.⁵²

Frying is, of all methods of cooking, the most objectionable, from the foods being less digestible when thus prepared, as the fat employed undergoes chemical changes. Olive oil in this respect is preferable to lard or butter.⁵³

Olive oil manufacturers no doubt with a view to their bottom line, also promoted olive oil over other mediums for frying:

Fry Your Fish and Eggs

In The Stonyfell Olive Company's Pure Virgin Olive Oil

You will never use butter or dripping again⁵⁴

Jan O'Connell in her *Australian food timeline* writes: 'For frying, oils relatively high cost led many cookbook authors to recommend dripping or lard as a more economical and satisfactory

⁵⁰'Rabbit Saluri' Best Recipe This Week. Weekly Times 13 October 1948 p.27 accessed at [13 Oct 1948 - Best Recipes This Week - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

⁵¹'To Cook Chicken' Domestic Recipes, *Advocate* 24 December 1887 p.4 accessed at [24 Dec 1887 - DOMESTIC RECIPES. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

⁵²'Household Items', *Oakleigh Leader* 16 August 1890 p.3 accessed at [16 Aug 1890 - HOUSEHOLD ITEMS. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#) '

⁵³ Olive Oil' *The Port Augusta Dispatch, Newcastle and Flinders Chronicle* 13 March 1914 p.6 accessed at [13 Mar 1914 - Olive Oil - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

⁵⁴ *Evening Journal* 30 January 1897 p4 accessed at [30 Jan 1897 - Advertising - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

alternative'.⁵⁵ I found only two references on the value or otherwise of olive oil in the cookery books I reviewed, both of which contradict this. The first is from an 1872 recipe for Artificial Milk:

Olive oil will be found practically far too expensive, and therefore a purified colza, cotton or other seed will be the most suitable, such oils being quite as nutritious for fattening purposes, and rather more digestible than the butter or animal oil of milk.⁵⁶

The second is from Flora Pell in her 1916 cookery book:

Butter and olive oil are good value for the money; containing practically no waste.⁵⁷

Masking the taste of olive oil

O'Connell writes: 'Australian cooks seemed to have a heavy hand with the vinegar in order to mask the taste of the oil.'

There was only one comment in the recipes reviewed about the taste of olive oil:

The best liquor to fry fish in is to take butter and Salad oil well clarified together. This hath not the unsavoury taste of oil along (sic) nor the blackness of butter alone. It fryeth fish crisp, yellow and well tasted.⁵⁸

More than salad dressing and frying fish

There is a generally held view that Australians had limited culinary engagement with olive oil prior to the European immigrant influx of the 1950s and 1960s. This article suggests that there is an alternative history, one in which Australians between 1865 – 1949 had domestic engagement with the olive through home pickling, home-based extraction of oil and using olives and olive oil for more than only salad dressing and frying fish.

⁵⁵ '1870 First commercial olive oil production' *Australian food timeline*, Jan O'Connell, accessed at [Australian food timeline - first successful olive oil production](#)

⁵⁶ 'Artificial Milk', *The Queenslander* 20 April 1872 p.5 accessed at [20 Apr 1872 - ARTIFICIAL MILK. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

⁵⁷ 'Butter and Olive Oil', Pell, Flora, *Our cookery book*, 1916 p.9

⁵⁸ Porter, John D. *The Chef Suggests. Strange and exciting dishes of the table for to-day and to-morrow* The National Press Pty Ltd. 1949 p.96

Appendix 1. Australian Cookery Books Reviewed

Abbott, Edward, *The English and Australian Cookery Book: Cookery for the Many, as well as the Upper Ten Thousand - by an Australian Aristologist*, Sampson Low, Son, and Marston, London, 1864

Australian Cookery of Today, The Sun News-Pictorial, [1943?]

Barossa cookery book: 1000 selected recipes 192?

Country Women's Association of New South Wales, *The Coronation Cookery Book*, 9th edition 1963
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Electrical Association for Women, *Cookery Book and Electrical Guide*, McKenzie, Mrs. F. V. (compiler), 2nd edition 1938

Davis Dainty Dishes, The Davis Organization, 1949

Drake, Lucy, *Everylady's Cook-Book*, Fitchett Brothers Melbourne 1924

Everything a Lady Should Know, Messrs. George B. Philip & Son, 1907

Foster Rutledge, Mrs., Compiler, *The Goulburn Cookery Book*, 1899

Gibbs, Miss A. *Miss Gibbs' Cookery Guide*, The Central Press 193?

Gilmore, Dame Mary, *The worker cook book: compiled from the tried recipes of thrifty housekeepers sent from all parts of Australia to The worker's woman's page* 1919.

Green and Gold Cookery Book: containing many good and proved recipes, issued by Combined Congregational and Baptise Churches of South Australia 1925

Heritage, Lizzie, *Cole's Household Cookery*, E. W. Cole 191?

Hook, Geo. England, *Australian Fruit Preserving. A Practical Treatise on the Best Methods*, 5th revised edition first edition 192?

Household Book, The New South Wales Society for Crippled Children 1941

King, Annie J, *"Carry On" Cookery Book*, 1918

The Lady Victoria Buxton Girls' Club Adelaide, *The Kookaburra Cookery Book*, South Australia, E.W. Cole, 1911

Maclurcan, Hannah, *Mrs Maclurcan's Cookery Book. A collection of practical recipes specially suited for Australia*, George Robertson and Co, Melbourne, 1898

McKenzie, Mrs F. V., *Cookery Book, compiled for the Electrical Association for Women (Australia)* Sydney., second edition 1938

Muskett, Philip E. *The Art of Living in Australia*, Eyre and Spottiswoode, London.1893

The New South Wales Cookery Teachers' Association, *Elementary Text Book of Cookery, Laundry and Home Management*, Halstead Press Pty Ltd, 1945

NSW Public School Cookery Teachers' Association, *The Advanced Commonsense Cookery Book*, 1948

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Pearson, Margaret *Australian cookery: Recipes for the people* (3rd edition 1894 but 1888 recipes)

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Rawson, Mrs, Lance (Mina), *The Antipodean Cookery Book and Kitchen Companion*, George Robertson and Company, 1895 (facsimile edition Kangaroo Press 1892)

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Schauer, A. and M. Schauer, *The Schauer Cookery book*, 1909

Truth and Daily Mirror Cookery Book, 1943

Wicken, Harriet, *Australian Table Dainties and Appetising Dishes*, Ward, Lock & Co., 1897

Wicken, H.F. *The Kingswood Cookery Book*, George Robertson and Company, Melbourne and Sydney, 1888.

Winning, Mrs. Theo, *Housekeeping for Two or More. Casserole and General Cooking*, E. W. Cole 1915

Wylie, Margaret A, Yewers, Mabel E, Reeves, Margaret H, Gray, Doris S, McKinnon, Maria A, *The Golden Wattle Cookery Book*, E. S. Wigg & Son Pty Ltd 1926

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Macaroni with Tomato - The Household, *Leader* 14 May 1881 p.5 [14 May 1881 - THE HOUSEHOLD. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

Preserving Yeast – Household Recipes, *Australian Town and Country Journal* 11 November p.28 [11 Nov 1882 - Household Recipes. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

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Steak and Macaroni - Muskett, Philip E. *The Art of Living in Australia*, Eyre and Spottiswoode, London.1893 p.205

Macaroni or Spaghetti – *Glen Innes Examiner and General Advertiser* 30 March 1894 p.3 [30 Mar 1894 - RECIPES. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

Paeila (sic), - Spanish Cookery, *Bunbury Herald* 19 June 1913 p.6 [19 Jun 1913 - SPANISH COOKERY. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

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Tartare Sauce - Gibbs, Miss A. *Miss Gibbs' Cookery Guide*, The Central Press 193? p.63

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