

*When it comes to specialty oils, understanding your oils is a great first step.*

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**Canola Oil** -- Pressed from tiny canola seeds produced by flowering plants of the Brassica family (the same botanical family as cabbages and cauliflower), and through traditional cross-breeding, canola was created by removing the undesirable characteristics from rapeseed in the mid-1970s. Canola, however, is not rapeseed -- their nutritional profiles are very different. Canola oil is officially defined as having less than two percent erucic acid and less than 30 umoles of glucosinolates, a strict internationally-regulated definition that differentiates canola from rapeseed. Oilseed products that do not meet this standard cannot use the trademarked term "canola." It has a mild flavor and aroma, and has a relatively high smoke point (400°F), making it a good all-purpose oil. Compared to other cooking oils, canola has the least amount of saturated fat (6 percent) and is rich in monounsaturated fats. Canola oil includes alphinolenic acid (ALA), an omega-3 fat that is often missing from diets.

**Coconut Oil** -- Extracted from the kernel or meat of matured coconut harvested from the coconut palm, the oil is produced primarily in India, Indonesia and the Philippines. It has a relatively low smoke point of 350°F. What makes coconut oil different from most other dietary oils is the basic building blocks or fatty acids making up the oil. Coconut oil is composed predominately of a special group of fat molecules known as medium chain fatty acids (MCFA), while the majority of fats in the human diet are composed almost entirely of long chain fatty acids (LCFA). Studies indicate the saturated fat in coconut oil metabolizes in the body similar to an unsaturated fat, so LDL cholesterol will not increase.

**Corn Oil** -- One of the most popular cooking oils, corn oil, made from the germ of the corn kernel, has a high smoke point of 450°F, making it an ideal choice for frying. It is high in polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats, and also higher in saturated fats than most other oils and is usually highly refined and hydrogenated. While it lowers LDL, it also lowers HDL cholesterol a bit, yet the result is still an improved HDL-to-LDL ratio.

**Cottonseed Oil** -- Relatively inexpensive and readily available, it is extracted from the seed of the cotton plant. One of the most widely used oils in many processed foods, such as cereals and potato chips, cottonseed oil is low in monounsaturated fats and high in saturated fats, and has a smoke

point of 420°F.

**Flaxseed Oil** -- This oil comes from the seed of the flax plant, an herb. It's the highest vegetable source of omega-3 fatty acids, which are also found in fish. Flaxseed oil provides the highest concentration of these fats of any non-fish food. The fatty acids make arteries more flexible, reduce inflammation in the arteries, reduce blood clots and even lessen the chance of fatal heart attacks. Scientists are particularly interested in flaxseed's anti-inflammatory properties and currently studying how it may help people with rheumatoid arthritis. The smoke point for unrefined flaxseed oil is 420°F., and heat destroys the omega-3 fats.

**Grapeseed Oil** – Pressed from the grape seeds left over from wine making, grapeseed oil can be combined with stronger-flavored, more expensive oils. Refined grapeseed oil has a smoke point of 400°F. Polyunsaturated, it is believed to reduce bad cholesterol in the arteries.

**Olive Oil** – Pressed from the fruit of the olive tree, olive oil is a monounsaturated fat and contains phytochemicals. and flavors range from bland to extremely strong. Olive oil is graded according to its degree of acidity and the process used to extract the oil. Oil labeled "virgin" is cold pressed (a process using no heat or chemicals) and contains low levels of acidity. It provides the body with vitamins E and F. Oil labeled "pure" uses heat and chemicals to process olive residue from subsequent pressings. Olive oil smoke points range from 320°F to 468°F.

**Palm Oil** – A very common cooking ingredient in southeast Asia and the tropical belt of Africa. Its increasing use in the commercial food industry in other parts of the world is buoyed by its cheaper pricing, and the high oxidative stability of the refined product and high smoke point of 446°F. Palm oil contains more saturated fats than other vegetable oils, but because the saturated fat is plant based, studies suggest it does not raise LDL cholesterol in the body.

**Peanut Oil** -- Made from pressed, steam-cooked peanuts, peanut oil contains 18 percent saturated fat. It is also high in monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats, which makes it a healthy oil to use. It also has a bland flavor and is good for cooking because it doesn't absorb or transfer flavors. Frying with peanut oil gives foods a rich, nutty, roasted flavor. It contains resveratrol, the substance in grapes and red wine associated with reduced cardiovascular disease and reduced cancer risk. Refined peanut oil has a smoke point of 450°F.

**Safflower Oil** -- Made from safflower seeds, a member of the thistle family, safflower oil has more polyunsaturated fat than other oils (78 percent). While low in saturated fat, it has a low level of monounsaturated fat, and lacks vitamin E. It is considered a good, all-purpose cooking oil. Refined safflower oil has a smoke point of 450°F.

**Sesame Oil** -- Crushing sesame seeds and filtering the resulting oil results in unrefined sesame oil. Mild in flavor, it is popular in Asian, Middle-Eastern and Indian cooking, and has a smoke point of 410°F. When toasted seeds are crushed, they produce a dark, more pungent-tasting sesame oil. Both varieties are high in polyunsaturated fat, and contain vitamin E, an antioxidant, which helps lower cholesterol. Sesame oil also contains magnesium, copper, calcium, iron and vitamin B6.

**Soybean Oil** -- Extracted from beans not seeds, highly refined soybean oil is reasonably priced, very mild in flavor, versatile and represents approximately 80 percent of all the cooking oils used in commercial food production in the U.S. Almost any product that lists vegetable oil as an ingredient most likely contains refined soybean oil. It is high in omega-3 fatty acids and vitamin E, rich in polyunsaturated fatty acids and monounsaturated fats and fairly low in saturated fat. With a smoke point of 450°F, soybean oil is a good, all-purpose oil.

**Sunflower Oil** – Pressed from sunflower seeds, sunflower oil has a bland flavor and is considered a good, all-purpose oil. There are three types of sunflower oil available; NuSun, linoleic and high oleic sunflower oil. All are developed with standard breeding techniques. They differ in oleic levels and each one offers unique properties. High oleic sunflower oils are classified as having monounsaturated levels of 80 percent and above. Low in saturated fat and high in polyunsaturated fat, sunflower Oil contains more vitamin E than other oils. Semi-refined sunflower oil has a smoke point of 450°F.

**Vegetable Oil** – The generic term "vegetable oil" is an inexpensive, all-purpose oil, which is a blend (or simply one type) of refined oils such as palm, corn, soybean or sunflower. Most vegetable oils are made primarily from soybeans and are high in monounsaturated fat, high in polyunsaturated fat and low in saturated fat. It has a mild flavor, and smoke point varies.

**Walnut Oil** -- Extracted from the meat of walnuts by pressing, walnut oil is high in polyunsaturated omega-3s and has been shown to lower triglycerides, which reduces the risk of coronary heart disease. Walnut oil has a nutty flavor, but it does have a shorter shelf life than some oils.

**Sources:** [Canolainfo.org](http://canolainfo.org), [www.thenibble.com](http://www.thenibble.com), [Wikipedia](http://Wikipedia), [The American Heart Association](http://The American Heart Association), [CBS Broadcasting Inc.](http://CBS Broadcasting Inc.),

**www.iseo.org, What's Cooking in America, National Sunflower Association, www.missvicky.com**

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