

Sicily Celebrates its Best Olive Oils

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The Sicilian province of Trapani boasts leadership in production of quality DOP (*Denominazione Origine Protetta* – Protected Designation of Origin) oils, a certified quality oil that in Sicily reaches 1,500 tons.

The certified valley of Nocellara del Belice, one of the six Sicilian DOP's, is rated in the top five DOP's in all Italy. The warm Sicilian sun, the soil, the saline breeze from the Mediterranean Sea make this extra virgin olive oil one of the best in Italy.

The DOP Certification introduced by European Community Regulation in 1992 guarantees the origin of food products. The entire oil production process of Nocellara del Belice from the the cultivation methods, harvesting techniques and milling to packaging must be strictly followed. Severe controls certify this.



Studies demonstrate that olive oil has many healthy benefits. That light tingle in your throat after having tasted Sicilian extra virgin oil has positive effects. Olive oil contains powerful antioxidants with anti-inflammatory, pain-killing and even anti-tumor potential.

Mr. Becchina the owner of the “Antica Tenuta dei Principi Pignatelli” explained that the olives are exclusively hand-picked and rigorously milled within the day for the production of his olive oil. 90% of it is exported to the United States, Germany and Switzerland.

Nearby is the “Case di Latomie”, located within a thousands-year-old quarry in which the ancient inhabitants of Selinunte extracted the stone to build their city. The Greek city’s origin dates back to the year 650 BC and many ruins still stand including the famous Selinunte temple. Signs of the extractions of these huge blocks are still visible within the resort. Antonio Centonze, the property owner, guided us through this historic site where an astonishing 700-year old olive tree stands. This olive tree incredibly still produces olives!

These organic olive groves produce excellent award-winning oils appreciated throughout the world. The original lithographed oil cans portraying beautiful sites of Sicily show Antonio’s passion for his family tradition.

If you are visiting Sicily during the olive harvest don’t miss to visit the Valle del Belice with its century-old olive groves. Don’t miss a stop at an oil mill where you can sample freshly pressed green aromatic olive oil: an unforgettable experience.

By [Maria Lina Bommarito](#)

Diego Planeta and Sicily's winemaking Renaissance

May 22, 2012 by [SicilyGuide](#) Filed under [Food & Wine](#), [Travel](#)



Lago Arancio – Planeta

Sicily, the largest island of the Mediterranean is one of Italy's most interesting winemaking regions. Sicilian winemaking dates back to the Phoenicians and the ancient Greeks. The island, with its variety of viticultural areas, climate and soil, can be compared to an entire continent.

Only a few decades ago, Sicilian wines were known as bulk wines and sold to enhance the gradation of French and Northern Italian wines. In the last thirty years Sicily has been shaking off its bulk wine reputation with an increasing number of winemakers producing and promoting higher quality wines.

Diego Planeta was one of the first winemakers that understood the necessity of improving Sicilian wines. His awareness of Sicily's quality wine potential inspired him to become pioneer of Sicilian quality winemaking. In the seventies Diego Planeta became president of "Cantine Settesoli" today one of Europe's largest and most successful cooperative wineries with 2,300 associates with an annual output of 22 million bottles.

As President of the Regional Institute of Vine and Wine in Sicily from 1975 to 1982, Diego Planeta promoted public investments in experimental research to improve the Sicilian winemaking process from the vineyard to the bottle. He spent his life-time experience convincing other wine makers to focus their efforts on producing high quality wines.

In 2004 Diego Planeta was conferred as "Cavaliere del Lavoro" by the President of the Italian Republic in recognition of his "immense contribution to promote the Sicilian wines around the world". In 2010 Italy issue of Decanter Magazine, Diego Planeta has been named among the Top 10 Most Influential Italians in the wine trade.

Decanter writes: “Diego Planeta has helped put Sicily on the world’s quality wine map. His family wine company led the Sicilian wine revolution, showing how a region whose annual production of grapes was the highest in Europe could improve its wines, market them with style and reach global markets...”

Today Planeta Winery is one of the premier wine estates of Sicily. The company has vineyards and estates in six different areas of Sicily. The Ulmo estate located on the Arancio Lake, near Sambuca, is their first winery and ancestral family home. Wine enthusiasts and not only can visit the estate and tour its vast vineyards, ancient olive groves and the ruins of an ancient Arab Castle.

By [Maria Lina Bommarito](#)

Sicilian housewives teach chefs “Signore Ricette”. A innovative idea that brings back to tradition

June 4, 2012 by [SicilyGuide](#) Filed under [Food & Wine](#)

Cantine Settesoli of Menfi (prov. of Agrigento), one of Europe’s largest cooperative wineries, has launched an original initiative to promote **Mandarossa Wines**, their top range production. The idea is to bring Sicilian traditional recipes inside the restaurants in a very original way. A team of housewives has been engaged to bring their cooking and teach professional chefs.

The importance of maintaining local traditions inspired Roberta Urso, public relation manager of the Settesoli Winery, with this original idea. “Wine is generated by its territory” she says “and is the expression of its particularity, vocation and tradition. Wine is territory and best savoured when paired with traditional dishes made with local products”.

“The real custodians of local gastronomy” she continues “are the mothers and grandmothers that prepare these everyday dishes using handed-down family recipes. Besides using natural local products and their hands, they add love and a pinch of creativity”.

Coordinated by Bonetta dell’Oglio – renowned chef and representative of Sicilian gastronomy – these women are putting together their know-how and are restoring traditional recipes often left aside.

The tasty dishes made with simple ingredients are not commonly found on restaurant menus, but they are very much appreciated. The initiative is obtaining great attention even beyond regional borders and as result, many restaurants are requesting the support of this very particular “teaching staff”.

By [Maria Lina Bommarito](#)

How to Make Cotognata, an Old-Time Sicilian Delicacy

December 4, 2012 by [SicilyGuide](#) Filed under [Food & Wine](#), [Traditions](#), [Recipes](#).



Fall is a beautiful season in Sicily. After the summer, the weather slowly changes because of the alternating of rain showers and beautiful sunny days. During this season, a variety of delicious fruits and vegetables enrich the Sicilian kitchen table.

An old-time sweet that reminds me of my childhood is the *cotognata* or quince paste. Quince is a pome fruit uneatable raw because of its tangy astringent flavor.

Quince trees grow in the southern regions of Italy, especially in Sicily where the summers are sufficiently hot for the fruits to ripe. In the spring, their lovely early pink blossoms are spectacular.

Brought to Sicily by the ancient Greeks, quinces have been mentioned by Roman historians as Pliny the Elder and Apicius in his cookbook. In the recent past *cotognata* was given to the children for All Saints' Day.

The preparation of the *cotognata* is a bit laborious, but patience transforms this fruit into a delicious dessert.

Ingredients:

- Quinces
- Granulated sugar
- Lemon

Directions:

Peel the quinces and cut each one into 4 chunks. Boil with a fresh lemon sliced in half at medium heat until cooked. Drain well discard lemon and let dry a few hours. Mash with a sieve.

For each pound of fruit add 13 oz. granulated sugar.

Cook in a saucepan at medium heat, mixing continuously. After the mixture reaches marmalade consistency, continue cooking and mixing for other 10 minutes. Pour into a Pyrex pan and level.

After cooling, slice into 1 inch square and let dry. After 2 days, turn pieces over and let dry other 2 days. When the pieces are dry on all sides the *cotognata* can be saved in the refrigerator.

By [Maria Lina Bommarito](#)

Granita, a Refreshing Dessert for a Sicilian Summer Day

July 2, 2012 by [SicilyGuide](#) Filed under [Food & Wine](#), [Recipes](#)



If you ask a Sicilian which is the most refreshing and thirst-quenching dessert for a hot summer day, she or he will certainly answer: “Granita, certamente!” (Granita, of course!).

Granita is a frozen dessert made with water and a syrup base, much like sherbet. It’s origins date back to the Arab domination in Sicily which has left so much to the island in spite of its relatively short period (827-1091 A.D.).

In the past the granita was a privilege only for the rich and aristocratic families as it was made using the snow gathered on Mount Etna and on the Peloritani and Nebrodi mountains, then stored in natural caves and extracted during the summer.

Every province of Sicily offers specially flavored granitas using seasonal fruits or ingredients typical of the area. The most popular granitas are made with fresh lemons, almonds, strawberries and coffee.

Catania is the homeland of almond granita, the so-called “minnulata catanese” which is sweet and delicious. The almonds contain a very small portion of bitterness very rich in aroma. Granita made with pistachios from Bronte is also very typical of that area.

Messina has a very tempting speciality, the coffee granita served in a particular glass in which the granita made with espresso coffee is topped with freshly whipped cream... impossible to resist!

Palermo's favorite, which is also the most popular granita throughout the island, is the lemon granita. The main characteristic of the lemon granita made in Palermo is the texture with its creaminess and more granular ice crystals.

In Sicily, granita may be served at breakfast with the typical brioche, or at any other time of the day. What's most important is the freshness and genuineness of the ingredients.

Recipe of Sicilian Granita al Limone

This is a recipe that I enjoy using because of it is fast and easy. All you must remember is "one, two, three".

- 1 cup fresh lemon juice
- 2 cups granulated sugar
- 3 cups water

Squeeze as many lemons necessary to fill one cup. Filter the juice and put aside. Heat the water, add the sugar and stir until the syrup is clear. Add the lemon juice, stir and pour into a container. When the mixture cools a bit, set the container in the freezer. After 2 hours stir the granita breaking the frozen surface and continue this procedure until it reaches the right consistency.

By [Maria Lina Bommarito](#)

Caponata

July 23, 2012 by [SicilyGuide](#) Filed under [Food & Wine](#), [Traditions](#), [Recipes](#)



Caponata is a very typical Sicilian dish, popular in the whole Mediterranean area. It can be described as a sweet-and-sour salad prepared with different vegetables.

The origins of **caponata** date back to ancient times when in the aristocratic families a particular type of fish the *capone*, was prepared with a sweet-and sour sauce. The people not were not able to afford fish substituted it with eggplants and gradually added other vegetables to the original recipe.

Caponata is usually prepared during the summer season when eggplants, the main ingredient, are at their best. There are different versions of caponata depending on the area and family traditions.

Together with the eggplants, various ingredients are used to prepare this delicious and tasting dish: onions, celery, carrots, peppers, green olives, and capers from Pantelleria.

Making caponata during the summer may be considered a bit laborious because of the warm temperature. but the result is certainly worth the effort.

Ingredients:

- 6 medium-sized eggplants
- 3 big white onions
- 3 carrots
- 2 celery stalks
- 1 pepper
- 1 cup pitted green olives
- 3 Tbs. pickled capers
- ½ cup tomatoes sauce
- ½ cup white vinegar
- 2 Tbs. sugar
- Frying oil

Method

Dice and salt the eggplants letting them drain for 1 hour. In the meantime peel and thinly slice the onions, carrots, celery and pepper.

In a large pan fry the eggplants and remove from the pan placing them in a large bowl. Individually fry the other vegetables removing from the pan and putting together with the fried eggplant. Using the same pan gently sauté the olives with the capers. Add the tomatoe sauce and when it starts thickening add the vinegar and the sugar. Stir and add the other vegetables.

The caponata can be served as “antipasto” or as a side dish.

By [Maria Lina Bommarito](#)

The Day of the Dead and All Saints' Day in Sicily

November 4, 2012 by [SicilyGuide](#) Filed under [Food & Wine](#), [Traditions](#)

The beginning of November is traditionally the time of the year dedicated to remember the dead in Sicily. Two important festivities that stretch back centuries are celebrated at the beginning of the month. November 1st is “All Saints’ Day”, a religious feast dedicated to all the Saints known and unknown. November 2nd is “All Souls’ Day” known in Sicilian as “U jouni rì morti” (the day of the dead) and is dedicated to ancestors and deceased family members. It may sound sad and mournful but actually it is not: more than a commemoration it is a celebration of these peoples’ lives.



[Marzipan fruits and sandwiches](#)

For children this was – until a few decades ago – the only holiday during which it was possible to receive gifts, mostly sweets and toys. As for all festivities, Sicilians prepare traditional specialties to celebrate the holiday. Most renowned of all are the marzipan fruit made with almond flour. These sweets look like real fruit and vegetables and are colorfully displayed in pastry shops and stands set up for the occasion.



Pupi di Zuccheru

Other sweets are prepared for this festivity: *taralli*, *mustazzoli* and *nucatoli*. The real protagonist of this holiday – and undoubtedly the children’s favorite – is the *pupo di zucchero* (sugar puppet) also called *pupaccena*. These beautiful statues made of sugar are painted by hand using the colors of the Sicilian carts.



Mustazzoli and Nucatoli

The *pupi di zucchero* represent traditional characters or items as knights and princesses, horse-drawn carts and saints. Nowadays other subjects have been added to better suit children's tastes. So, nothing odd about seeing a brave knight unseating his spade next to Spiderman or Batman all displayed for the joy of the holiday.

By [Maria Lina Bommarito](#)

[The Asmundo Palace in Palermo](#)

April 10, 2012 by [SicilyGuide](#) Filed under [Arts & Culture](#)



[Cathedral](#) - Photo by [Maria Lina Bommarito](#)

The **Asmundo Palace** is one of the most beautiful and well-kept aristocratic homes of [Palermo](#). The palace located on the ancient *road of the Cassaro* (today's Corso Vittorio Emanuele), faces the Cathedral and is an extraordinary example of [Palermo](#)'s historical splendor. The construction of the palace dates back to the early 1600's when Sicilian nobility began its migration from the countryside to the city. The aristocratic families of those times showed off luxury and opulence to affirm their status and prestige.

It is in this context that in 1764 the President of Justice **Giuseppe Asmundo Paternò** – marquis of Sessa – enlarged the existing structure commissioning the renowned artist **Gioacchino Martorana** the beautiful frescos of the lounges of the noble floor. Exquisite stuccoes, Venetian blinds and Baroque doors embellish the chambers of the floor that opens with the Concert Chamber with its stunningly beautiful ceiling.

Today the palace preserves much of its original traits, an artistic exemplar of the Sicilian Baroque style. The present owners, the **Martorana Family**, have renovated and reopened the palace as a museum of itself.

The precious frescos of the 18th century alcove, the Sicilian ceramics, the Neapolitan and French porcelains so often mentioned by travelers and guests of the palace, are open to the public.

The collections include an interesting exposition of weapons from the 16th to the 19th century, a rarity for its extent. Another unique collection comprises a series of antique charts and maps of Sicily, object of study and research kept by **Pierluigi Martorana**, the current administrator of the **Asmundo Palace**.

Today the palace is site of cultural events, expositions and receptions. Upon reservation it is possible to have a guided tour of the palace and its collections, and enjoy a typical Sicilian buffet with exclusive view of the Cathedral. By [Maria Lina Bommarito](#)

Coastal Watchtowers in Sicily

October 12, 2012 by [SicilyGuide](#) Filed under [Travel, Arts, Culture, Territory](#).

It is possible to find local testimonies of the island's turbulent history in every part of Sicily. A series of watchtowers dating back to different periods still stand along the coasts of Sicily. These constructions were the backbone of the Sicilian defense system against foreign invaders throughout the ages.



[Torre Capo Rama in Terrasini](#)

The first towers date back to the period between 1313 and 1345 as a bastion of the Aragonese dynasty against the frequent incursions of the Angevin fleet from Naples.

In 1360 the threat of invasions came from the South, from North African Maghreb pirates and Turkish corsairs.



[Torre Alba Terrasini \(Palermo\)](#)

Most of the watchtowers still existent were commissioned by the Sicilian Parliament in 1583 and built between the end of the 16th and the 17th centuries. The towers were built in strategic positions along the coasts, close enough from each other to communicate with each other. The communication system consisted of visual signals as smoke in the daytime and fires during the night. The signals would be used from tower to tower passing the message of danger quickly and effectively. Acoustic signals as bells and cannon shots were also used to alert the villagers of the imminent threat and to prepare to fight or flee.



Torre Pozzillo Cinisi (Palermo)

The watchtowers had a four-sided solid layout. The entrance was located on the top floor and a wooden ladder was used for entry and exit from the tower.



Torre Isola delle Femmine (Palermo)

The ground level was set above a large cistern used to guarantee water supply in case of enemy siege. Food and munitions were also stored, making the tower self sufficient. Up to today 218 watchtowers still exist. Although many of the old watchtowers have been abandoned and fallen in ruin, others have been restored and still stand as they did hundreds of years ago.

By [Maria Lina Bommarito, Photos.](#)

The Charioteer of Mothya Testimonial of the London Olympics

June 25, 2012 by [SicilyGuide](#) Filed under [Travel, Arts & Culture](#)



This magnificent Sicilian statue considered one of the finest examples of classical Greek marble sculptures will be displayed at the British Museum in London in honor of the forthcoming 2012 Olympic Games.

The museum is featuring 12 star objects on the theme of winning, including the rarely loaned sculpture discovered on the small island of Mothya just off the West coast of Sicily in 1979.

Dating from the Fifth century BC, the white marble statue about two meters high represents a winning charioteer proudly relishing victory.

The charioteer of Mothya – testimonial of Sicily’s artistic and cultural heritage – is result of a collaborative agreement between the British Museum and the Assessorato dei Beni Culturali e dell’Identità Siciliana.

By [Maria Lina Bommarito](#)

Fall in Cinisi and Terrasini (PA)

September 26, 2012 by [SicilyGuide](#) Filed under [Arts - Culture & Territory](#)

Some beautiful pictures from our Sicilian correspondent [Maria Lina Bommarito](#) to illustrate the fall in Sicily. It looks still summer to me!



Peaceful beach in Cinisi



Fishing in Cinisi



Cinisi Seaside



Houses overlooking the sea in Terrasini



Characteristic seaside restaurant in Terrasini

The Fondo Orsa (Photos)

July 31, 2012 by [SicilyGuide](#) Filed under [Travel](#), [Arts](#), [Culture](#), [Territory](#).

The Fondo Orsa sea shores of Cinisi (20 miles West of Palermo) offer sea lovers crystal clear waters and inebriating scents.





By [Maria Lina Bommarito](#), [Photos](#), [The Fondo Orsa](#)

Between Cinisi and Carini in Sicily

September 10, 2012 by [SicilyGuide](#) Filed under [Travel](#), [Arts](#), [Culture](#), [Territory](#).





By [Maria Lina Bommarito Photos](#)

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