

OILS & FATS TECHNICAL GUIDE

Understanding Edible Oils in the UK

Types, nutritional differences and cooking applications — a reference for caterers, food manufacturers and procurement teams.

Downloadable technical guide for UK foodservice and manufacturing buyers.

Olympic Foods Technical Team · Reviewed June 2026 · Edition 1

Olympic Oils Ltd (trading as Olympic Foods) · Fallows Way, Whiston, Merseyside, L35 1RZ · Established 1990 · BRCGS Issue 9 (AA Grade)

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INTRODUCTION

01 What are edible oils?

Edible oils are an important part of cooking in UK households, restaurants, and the food manufacturing industry. They affect flavour, texture, shelf life, and nutritional value. With growing awareness around healthy eating, consumers in the UK are paying closer attention to the type of oil they use.

Used in frying, roasting, baking, dressings, margarines and processed foods — the right oil depends on cooking method, flavour requirements, budget and sustainability goals.



Need help choosing the right oil for your application? Olympic Foods can advise on fat profile, allergen status, fryer life, pack format and cost-in-use. Call **0151 449 4930** or email sales@olympicfoods.co.uk.

02 Types of fat in oils

Saturated fat

Usually solid at room temperature. Excessive intake may contribute to raised cholesterol. Use in moderation.

Coconut oil Palm oil

Monounsaturated (MUFA)

Considered heart-healthier. Recommended as part of a balanced diet by UK health authorities.

Olive oil Rapeseed oil
Avocado oil

Polyunsaturated (PUFA)

Contains essential Omega-3 and Omega-6 fatty acids that the body cannot produce on its own.

Sunflower oil Corn oil
Flaxseed oil

03 Omega-6 vs omega-3 — why the ratio matters

Both omega-6 (linoleic acid) and omega-3 (alpha-linolenic acid, ALA) are essential fatty acids — your body cannot make them. The British Nutrition Foundation and SACN highlight that modern UK diets are heavily skewed toward omega-6, with typical intakes running at **10:1 to 20:1** against omega-3. A ratio closer to 4:1 or lower is often used as a practical benchmark for cardiovascular and inflammatory health.

Oil	Omega-6	Omega-3	Approx. ratio
Flaxseed oil	~14%	~53%	1 : 4 (omega-3 dominant)
Rapeseed oil	~19%	~9%	~2 : 1
Soya bean oil (vegetable)	~51%	~7%	~7 : 1
Extra virgin olive oil	~10%	~0.8%	~13 : 1
Groundnut oil	~32%	0%	omega-6 only
Sunflower oil (standard)	~65%	~0.2%	very high omega-6

KEY TAKEAWAY

For bulk cooking, **rapeseed oil** offers one of the most favourable omega-6 to omega-3 ratios among commercially practical UK oils — a major reason it has overtaken sunflower as the default catering oil.

04 Smoke points — which oils can take the heat?

The smoke point is the temperature at which an oil begins to break down, releasing visible smoke, free radicals and aldehydes. Oils with higher smoke points are better suited to high-temperature frying and roasting.



High-temperature frying demands an oil with a high, stable smoke point.

Refined vs unrefined matters. Values shown are for refined oils unless stated. Cold-pressed, virgin and unrefined equivalents typically have smoke points 30–50°C lower. Published smoke points also vary by refining level, supplier and test method, so treat the figures below as indicative.

Avocado oil (refined)		270°C / 518°F	High heat
Groundnut oil (refined)		232°C / 450°F	High heat
Coconut oil (refined)		230°C / 446°F	High heat
Soya bean / vegetable oil		230°C / 446°F	High heat
Palm oil (refined)		230°C / 446°F	High heat
Sunflower oil (refined)		227°C / 441°F	High heat
Rapeseed oil (refined)		220°C / 428°F	High heat
Sesame oil (refined / light)		210°C / 410°F	Medium heat
Extra virgin olive oil		200°C / 392°F	Medium heat
Coconut oil (virgin)		177°C / 351°F	Low / cold
Sesame oil (toasted / dark)		175°C / 347°F	Low / cold
Flaxseed oil (cold use only)		107°C / 225°F	Low / cold

High heat (frying, roasting)

Medium heat

Low heat / cold use only

KEY TAKEAWAY

Match the oil to the temperature: use high-smoke-point refined oils for frying and roasting, and reserve delicate cold-pressed, virgin and toasted oils for dressings and finishing.

05 Nutritional comparison

Oil	Main fat type	Health profile	Best use
Olive oil (extra virgin)	Monounsaturated	Excellent	Dressings, light frying
Rapeseed oil	Monounsaturated	Excellent	All-purpose
Avocado oil	Monounsaturated	Very good	High-heat cooking
Groundnut (peanut) oil	Monounsaturated	Good	Stir-fry, deep frying
Sunflower oil	Polyunsaturated	Good	Frying, baking
Soya bean oil ("vegetable oil")	Polyunsaturated	Good	General cooking, manufacturing
Sesame oil (refined)	Polyunsaturated	Good	Stir-frying, marinades
Flaxseed oil	Omega-3 PUFA	Excellent	Cold use only
Coconut oil	Saturated	Use moderately	Baking, Asian cooking
Palm oil	Saturated	Use moderately	Processed foods

 Excellent / very good  Good  Use moderately

Health-profile labels are indicative only; suitability depends on the total diet and the specific application.

A note on "vegetable oil": in UK catering and food manufacturing supply, "vegetable oil" commonly refers to refined soya bean oil. In UK retail it is more often 100% rapeseed. Always check the product specification — the fat profile and allergen status are not the same.

06 Common edible oils in the UK

Oil	Fat type	Smoke pt	Best for	Notes
Rapeseed oil	MUFA	220°C	Frying, roasting, baking, dressings	UK-grown; low saturates; best omega-6:3 ratio (~2:1)
Extra virgin olive oil	MUFA	200°C	Dressings, pasta, dipping, light frying	Rich in polyphenols; Mediterranean staple
Sunflower oil	PUFA	227°C	Deep frying, chips, baking, processed foods	Neutral flavour; high vitamin E; affordable
Soya bean oil	PUFA	230°C	Frying, commercial kitchens, baking	Sold as "vegetable oil" in UK catering; declarable allergen
Groundnut oil	MUFA	232°C	Stir-fry, deep frying, wok cooking	Refined: high smoke point; refined oil exempt from allergen labelling
Coconut oil	Saturated	230°C	Baking, curries, Asian cooking	Refined ~230°C / virgin ~177°C; distinctive flavour when virgin
Avocado oil	MUFA	270°C	Grilling, roasting, high-heat frying	Highest smoke point (refined); mild flavour; premium
Sesame oil	PUFA	210°C	Stir-fries, marinades, finishing	Refined ~210°C / toasted ~175°C; declarable allergen
Flaxseed oil	PUFA (omega-3)	107°C	Dressings, smoothies, drizzles	Highest omega-3 (ALA) of any common oil; cold use only
Palm oil	Saturated	230°C	Biscuits, margarine, crisps, frozen foods	Long shelf life; always specify RSPO segregated

07 Cold-pressed vs refined oils

Cold-pressed

Produced without high heat or chemicals. Better flavour and nutrient retention — preferred for dressings and finishing oils.

- ✓ Better flavour profile
- ✓ More antioxidants retained
- ✓ Minimal processing
- × Higher cost per unit
- × Lower smoke point

Refined

Processed for heat stability and extended shelf life. Standard for commercial kitchens, food manufacturing and high-volume frying.

- ✓ High smoke point
- ✓ Longer shelf life
- ✓ Neutral flavour — versatile
- × Fewer natural antioxidants
- × More industrial processing

KEY TAKEAWAY

For frying and roasting, use refined oils. Reserve cold-pressed, virgin and toasted oils for dressings, finishing and lower-temperature applications.

08 High-oleic variants — for fryer life and stability

High-oleic varieties are conventionally bred (not GM) seed crops with a fatty-acid profile re-balanced toward monounsaturated oleic acid. Compared with standard equivalents, they offer markedly better oxidative stability, longer fryer life, and a cleaner finish in fried products.

- **HOSO (high-oleic sunflower)** — typically 80%+ oleic acid (vs. ~30% in standard sunflower). Widely specified for crisps, snacks and extended-life fryer applications. Smoke point ~232°C.
- **High-oleic rapeseed** — increasingly available in UK supply. Combines rapeseed's low saturates with the oxidative stability of olive oil, at a catering price point.
- **High-oleic soya** — used in food manufacturing where soya origin is required but PUFA-driven oxidation needs to be reduced.

Procurement note: high-oleic oils typically command a 15–30% premium over standard equivalents but can considerably extend fryer-oil life (commonly cited at around 2–3×, depending on operation and filtration) — often a net cost saving in high-throughput frying. Actual performance varies; Olympic Foods can advise based on your specific application.

09 Best oils by cooking method

Deep frying

Sunflower, rapeseed, soya bean (vegetable) oil

Roasting & grilling

Rapeseed, refined avocado oil

Salad dressings

Extra virgin olive, flaxseed, cold-pressed rapeseed

Stir-frying

Refined groundnut, refined sesame, rapeseed

Baking

Rapeseed, refined coconut, soya bean

Air frying

Rapeseed, sunflower (light spray)

10 Choosing the right oil for your business

A quick starting point by priority. The best choice always depends on your full specification — cooking method, allergen policy, nutrition target, pack format and cost-in-use.

Your priority	Recommended oil	Why
Lowest-cost general frying	Vegetable / soya or rapeseed	Neutral flavour, widely available
Better nutrition profile	Rapeseed	Low saturates, favourable omega ratio
Longer fryer life	High-oleic sunflower or rapeseed	Better oxidative stability
Allergen-sensitive menus	Rapeseed or sunflower	Avoids soya / sesame / peanut declarations
Sustainability-led sourcing	British rapeseed or RSPO palm	Stronger sourcing story

Not sure which fits best? Send us your application and volumes and we'll recommend a specification — sales@olympicfoods.co.uk · 0151 449 4930.

11 NHS guidance on edible oils

The NHS recommends:

- ✓ Choose unsaturated oils (olive, rapeseed, sunflower) where possible
- ✓ Reduce saturated fat intake — limit coconut and palm oil use
- ✓ Avoid repeatedly reheating oils — replace after a few frying cycles
- ✓ Use all oils in moderation — all fats are calorie dense (around 9 kcal per gram)

Source: NHS — [Different fats and nutrition](#) and the [Eatwell Guide](#).

Healthier options most widely recommended: **olive oil** and **rapeseed oil**. Sunflower and soya bean ("vegetable") oils are practical for frying. Coconut and palm should be used more moderately.

12 Trans fats in the UK supply chain

Industrial trans fatty acids (iTFA) — once common in margarines and bakery shortenings made from partially hydrogenated oils — have been almost entirely eliminated from the UK food supply. The Food Standards Agency secured voluntary industry removal between 2007 and 2011, and a hard regulatory cap of **2 g iTFA per 100 g of fat** applies under retained EU Regulation 2019/649.

All Olympic Foods oils, hydrogenated fats and shortenings comply with this limit and are produced using **full hydrogenation** or **interesterification** rather than partial hydrogenation. Specifications and certificates of analysis are available on request.

13 Allergen labelling — what UK food businesses need to know

Several edible oils derive from one of the 14 allergens that must be declared on UK food labels under FSA rules (retained EU FIC, Regulation 1169/2011, as amended by Natasha's Law for PPDS).

Oil	Allergen status	Labelling required?
Soya bean oil - fully refined	Derived from soya, but exempt under FIC Annex II	No allergen declaration required where fully refined status is confirmed
Soya bean oil - unrefined / not confirmed fully refined	Soya - listed allergen	Yes - declare soya in bold
Sesame oil	Sesame - listed allergen	Yes - declare in bold
Groundnut (peanut) oil - refined	Peanut - listed allergen	Exempt under FIC Annex II (refined only)
Groundnut (peanut) oil - cold-pressed / virgin	Peanut - listed allergen	Yes - declare in bold
Rapeseed, sunflower, olive, coconut, palm, avocado, flaxseed	Not on the FSA-14 list	No declaration required

KEY TAKEAWAY

Fully refined soya bean oil is exempt from allergen declaration where fully refined status is confirmed. Soya and sesame oils require declaration where the oil is unrefined, or the exemption cannot be substantiated. Always confirm against the current product specification.

Cross-contamination management still applies even where labelling is exempt. Olympic Foods operates allergen-segregated production lines and full audit-traceable supply for all oils.

14 Storage and shelf life

Edible oils degrade through oxidation (driven by air, light and heat) and hydrolysis (driven by water and free fatty acids). Storage matters as much as the oil itself.

- Unopened, ambient (15-20°C, dark): refined oils 18-24 months; cold-pressed / extra virgin 12-18 months; flaxseed 6-9 months (refrigerate).
- Opened, in service: use refined oils within 3 months of opening, cold-pressed within 1 month, flaxseed within 3 weeks (refrigerated).
- Frying oil in commercial use: filter daily; replace every 6-8 frying cycles or when free fatty acid (FFA) content exceeds 2%, smoke point drops below 170°C, or the oil darkens / foams.
- Bulk storage: avoid copper and unlined steel (catalyses oxidation). IBCs should be kept under cover, away from heat sources, with breather caps or nitrogen blanketing for premium oils.

Frequent fryer-oil testing (FFA strips or polar-compound meters) gives a more accurate replacement signal than calendar cycles alone, and is increasingly expected under BRCGS Issue 9 hazard reviews.

15 Sustainability and sourcing

UK consumers and food businesses are increasingly concerned about carbon footprint, sustainable sourcing, and deforestation linked to certain tropical and oilseed crops.



On-site solar generation at Olympic's Merseyside production facility.

British rapeseed

UK-grown, low food miles and no tropical land-use-change footprint. Widely considered the lowest-impact volume cooking oil available in the UK.

Palm oil

RSPO Segregated certification strongly recommended. Mass-balance is acceptable but does not guarantee deforestation-free supply. Olympic Foods supplies RSPO-certified palm.

Carbon footprint

UK-grown rapeseed and sunflower deliver a substantially lower transport emissions footprint than imported tropical oils like palm and coconut.

EUDR and UK Schedule 17 — what's changing

Following a further postponement adopted in December 2025 (Regulation (EU) 2025/2650), the **EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR, 2023/1115)** applies from **30 December 2026** for operators, with an extra six-month cushion (to **30 June 2027**) for micro and small enterprises. It requires due-diligence statements proving that palm and soya placed on the EU market are deforestation-free since 31 December 2020. UK exporters, and UK manufacturers feeding into EU supply chains, should continue preparing due-diligence documentation.

Domestically, **Schedule 17 of the Environment Act 2021** provides for a parallel UK due-diligence regime for forest-risk commodities. It is not yet in force — secondary legislation is still required to operationalise it, with the initial focus expected on cattle products, cocoa, palm oil and soy. Large UK operators should prepare for comparable obligations.

Olympic Foods is preparing EUDR-aligned origin documentation for all palm and soya supply. Geolocation and chain-of-custody data can be made available on request.

16 How Olympic Foods supplies these oils

Olympic Foods is a UK-based bulk oils supplier serving food manufacturers, contract caterers, wholesalers and chip-shop networks. Pack sizes, lead times and accreditations:

Format	Capacity	Typical use
Bottles & PET	3L · 5L · 10L	Foodservice, retail, smaller kitchens
Drums & Bottle-in-Box	15L · 20L	Mid-volume catering and manufacturing
Boxes & buckets	12.5kg – 20L	Mayonnaise, sauces and fats
IBCs (totes)	1,000L	High-volume manufacturing, fryer top-up



Bottles & PET



Drums



Bottle-in-Box



IBCs (1,000L)

Accreditations & supply assurances: BRCGS Food Safety Issue 9 (AA Grade) · Kosher · RSPO Segregated palm · SEDEX SMETA · Halal suitable · allergen-managed production · certificates of analysis on request.

Full liquid oils range includes refined rapeseed, sunflower, soya bean (vegetable oil), olive blends, groundnut, coconut and HOSO. **Lead times:** next-day for stocked lines (rapeseed, sunflower, vegetable, palm); 5–10 working days for specialist or high-oleic specifications. Nationwide UK delivery.

Request a specification sheet or quote: 0151 449 4930 · sales@olympicfoods.co.uk

17 Frequently asked questions

What is the healthiest cooking oil in the UK?

Cold-pressed rapeseed and extra virgin olive oil are most widely recommended by UK health authorities, including the NHS and the British Nutrition Foundation. Both are high in monounsaturated fat, and rapeseed has one of the lowest omega-6 to omega-3 ratios of any common cooking oil (around 2:1).

Is “vegetable oil” the same as soya bean oil?

It depends on the supplier. In UK retail, “vegetable oil” is most often 100% rapeseed oil. In the wider catering and food manufacturing supply — including products supplied by Olympic Foods — it typically refers to refined soya bean oil. Always check the label or specification, as the fat profile and allergen status differ.

Can I reuse frying oil?

Yes, but limit reuse. The NHS and FSA advise against repeatedly reheating oils because oxidation produces harmful aldehydes and reduces the smoke point. Filter after each use, store cool and dark, and replace once the oil darkens, foams, or develops an off odour — typically after 6 to 8 frying cycles in commercial kitchens.

What is the smoke point of an oil and why does it matter?

The smoke point is the temperature at which an oil starts to break down, releasing visible smoke and harmful free radicals. Cooking above it degrades flavour, nutrition, and food safety. Refined oils generally have higher smoke points than cold-pressed or virgin equivalents.

Is rapeseed oil the same as canola oil?

Yes — canola is the North American trade name for low-erucic-acid rapeseed oil. UK rapeseed has been bred to the same low-erucic-acid standard since the 1970s, so the two are nutritionally equivalent.

Is palm oil bad for the environment?

Conventionally produced palm oil has been linked to tropical deforestation and biodiversity loss. RSPO-certified Segregated palm oil offers verified deforestation-free supply. The EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) and the UK's Environment Act Schedule 17 are introducing due-diligence requirements for palm-derived ingredients.

Are refined oils considered allergens under UK law?

Soya oil and sesame oil must be declared as allergens on UK labels under FSA rules. Refined groundnut (peanut) oil is exempt under retained EU FIC Annex II provisions, but cold-pressed groundnut oil must be declared. Rapeseed, sunflower, olive, coconut, palm, avocado and flaxseed are not on the FSA-14 list.

18 Summary

Different edible oils have different nutritional properties, flavours and cooking applications. In the UK market, rapeseed, olive, sunflower and soya bean (vegetable) oil remain the most commonly used. Refined groundnut, coconut and RSPO-certified palm play important specialised roles.

For healthier cooking: rapeseed and extra virgin olive oil are widely recommended. Sunflower and soya bean ("vegetable") oils are practical for high-volume frying. Coconut and palm should be used more moderately.

Choosing the right oil depends on: cooking method · desired flavour · fat profile · allergen considerations · budget · sustainability and regulatory requirements.

19 Oil selection checklist

Before choosing an oil for a new line or menu, confirm:

- 1 Cooking method — deep frying, baking, roasting, dressing or manufacturing
- 2 Required smoke point for the application
- 3 Allergen status — especially soya, sesame and peanut
- 4 Desired nutrition profile (saturates, omega balance)
- 5 Required pack format — 3–10L, drum, Bottle-in-Box, bucket or IBC
- 6 Sustainability requirement — British origin, RSPO palm, EUDR-facing supply
- 7 Cost-in-use, not only price per litre

Olympic Foods can help you work through this checklist and match a specification, pack format and price to your operation — sales@olympicfoods.co.uk · 0151 449 4930 · olympicfoods.co.uk

20 Sources and references

1. NHS — Different fats and nutrition (Eat well)
2. NHS — The Eatwell Guide
3. British Nutrition Foundation — Fats: types, function and recommendations
4. SACN, Saturated fats and health (2019), Public Health England
5. Food Standards Agency — Allergen guidance for food businesses (FIC Reg. 1169/2011, retained)
6. Retained EU Regulation 2019/649 — limit on industrial trans fatty acids (2 g/100 g fat)
7. EU Regulation 2025/2650 — postponement of the EU Deforestation Regulation to 30 Dec 2026
8. European Commission — EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR, 2023/1115)
9. UK Government — Environment Act 2021, Schedule 17
10. USDA FoodData Central — fatty-acid composition values
11. Modern Olives Laboratory Services (2018) — Smoke point and oxidative stability of cooking oils

This guide is provided for general information and reflects regulations current at the review date. Product specifications, certificates of analysis and allergen declarations are available on request. © 2026 Olympic Oils Ltd (trading as Olympic Foods).



Bulk oils for caterers & manufacturers

Rapeseed, sunflower, olive, soya bean (vegetable), groundnut, coconut and high-oleic oils — supplied across the UK in bottle, drum, Bottle-in-Box, bucket and 1,000L IBC quantities.

Talk to our team

0151 449 4930 · sales@olympicfoods.co.uk

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