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MAY 2026

FRUIT SET

The flowering held. Every grove, every tree, blossomed and pollinated through April and into early May, and the first olives are now visible on the branches. Tiny, the size of a small bead, no pip inside them yet. Fragile in a way that has no equivalent later in the season. A heatwave over the next two weeks could dry them out and end the harvest before it begins.

Once they get past this stage, the trees can take almost anything the weather throws at them. We are not there yet.

Winter saved us after four years of consecutive drought. The reservoirs are at around 40%, and the summer ahead will still be hard, but the soil is holding moisture deep, the trees are healthier than they have been in years, and we begin May with something we have not had in a long time: a normal year.

The island itself is changing colour now. The grasses that turned everything green in February and March are completing their cycle and going yellow. Wheat is being harvested across the central plain. We are crossing 30 degrees daily, with a brief cold snap early in the month that put snow back on the Troodos peaks. From here, it is summer.

Nick Schizas & Nicolas Netien Founders

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COMPOUND OF THE MONTH

LIGSTROSIDE: THE OTHER HALF OF THE FAMILY

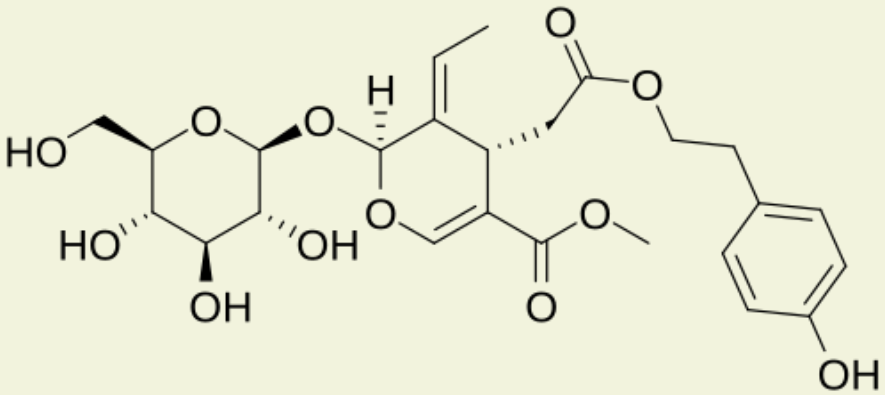
Five compounds, five months. Oleocanthal, oleacein, hydroxytyrosol, oleuropein, tyrosol. Ligstroside is the sixth, and it completes the chemical family in a way that explains why high-quality extra virgin olive oil works the way it does.

Olive trees produce two parallel polyphenol pathways. One builds around hydroxytyrosol: oleuropein is the precursor, oleacein is the dialdehyde form. The other builds around tyrosol: ligstroside is the precursor, oleocanthal is the dialdehyde form. The two pathways run side by side in the fruit. Ligstroside is to oleocanthal what oleuropein is to oleacein. Without it, oleocanthal does not exist in meaningful concentrations in the oil.

Ligstroside has been less studied in isolation than oleuropein, partly because it is harder to extract and partly because most early research focused on its better-known sibling.

That is changing. A 2024 study published in the Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry characterized ligstroside's antioxidant activity in cell culture models and confirmed it survives the upper digestive tract largely intact, reaching the colon where it becomes available to gut bacteria. Work at the University of Jaen in Spain has shown that ligstroside aglycone, the form produced during extraction, demonstrates direct anti-inflammatory activity through pathways that overlap but do not duplicate those of oleuropein.

Your 2025 harvest carries ligstroside alongside the other major compounds. The oil delivers the whole pathway, not just the endpoints. That is the difference between consuming an isolated polyphenol and consuming the matrix that the olive tree produced.



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THE SCIENCE IN ACTION

MONTHLY STUDY HIGHLIGHT

THE PREDIMED-PLUS GUT MICROBIOME STUDY (MICROBIOME, JANUARY 2026)

In January 2026, a team led by Jiaqi Ni at the Universitat Rovira i Virgili in Spain published the first prospective human study designed to examine how olive oil affects the brain through the gut microbiome. The research followed 656 adults aged 55 to 75 over two years within the PREDIMED-Plus project, one of the largest Mediterranean diet trials ever conducted.

The findings separated cleanly along one variable: type of olive oil. Participants who consumed virgin olive oil showed improved cognitive performance and greater gut microbial diversity. Participants who consumed refined olive oil showed neither. In fact, refined olive oil consumers showed reduced microbial diversity over the two-year period.

The researchers identified a specific gut bacterium, Adlercreutzia, that was significantly more abundant in virgin olive oil consumers. Statistical analysis showed that changes in Adlercreutzia abundance mediated approximately half of the cognitive improvement observed. Adlercreutzia is a polyphenol-metabolizing genus, which means it specializes in breaking down plant compounds into smaller, bioactive secondary metabolites that the body can absorb and use.

This study matters for one reason: it identifies a specific mechanism in humans. The conversation around olive oil and brain health has been built on epidemiological associations and animal models for years. The Ni et al. work moves it forward by naming a microbial mediator in a real population, tracked over real time.
It also confirms something simpler: 90 to 95% of ingested polyphenols are not absorbed in the small intestine. They reach the colon intact, where resident bacteria use them as fuel. Virgin olive oil polyphenols act as prebiotics. They selectively promote Bifidobacterium, Lactobacillus, and butyrate-producing species while reducing pro-inflammatory markers. A separate 2025 human study published in Antioxidants confirmed that daily EVOO consumption shifted gut microbiota toward healthier compositions and reduced IL-1-beta, a key inflammatory cytokine.

Your daily 5ml pod delivers the polyphenol concentration that makes this mechanism work. Refined olive oils, despite containing the same fats, do not produce the same outcomes. The compounds drive the effect, and the compounds reach the colon. That is the link.

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FROM THE GROVES

May in Cyprus: Fire Watch and Fragile Olives

The work in the groves has shifted. The families are mowing the dry grasses now, not for aesthetics but to prevent fires. Cyprus is in the middle of a serious foot and mouth disease outbreak. Sheep and goats are banned from grazing outside, which historically would have kept the dry grass down across rural Cyprus. Without them, fire risk climbs. Every grove needs to be cleared by hand and by machine before the summer truly arrives.

The tiny olives forming on the branches have no pip yet. That is what makes them vulnerable. A heatwave above 38 to 40 degrees in the next two weeks could desiccate them before they harden off. Once they form their pip, the trees become resilient: drought, heat, dust, almost anything the summer throws at them. The five families are watching the forecasts the way pilots watch weather. There is nothing to do but prepare well and wait.

CLOSING NOTE

The 2026 harvest preparations continue. The flowering went well, the fruit set is underway, and the next two weeks will tell us a lot about what October looks like.

On the new product: development is progressing well. The high-fibre formulation we mentioned in March is now in final testing. It is designed to work symbiotically with the oil, no live cultures, with clinically backed ingredients chosen for the same gut microbiome mechanism the Ni et al. study describes. We will share more as the launch date approaches.

Stay consistent through the heat ahead.

Nick & Nicolas