



writer-designer.com > writing sample

*From Recipe Rangers in the West  
by E. T. Ellison & Barbara Montgomery.*

Todd Ellison  
Writer-Designer.Com  
etoddellison@aol.com  
25101 Bear Valley Rd  
PMB 129  
Tehachapi, CA 93561  
tel 661-821-6260  
fax 661-821-5309

Co-author Barbara and I each wrote about half the stories and other content in this book. This sample is from my half and incorporates both imaginative whimsy (the story of Ajo and Olivia) and instructive exposition (the garlic interlude). Fringe benefits are the secret garlic schmeer formulations. This excerpt is from *Recipe Rangers in the West: Book One*, published by Wynderry Press.

if you, too, would Dare to Trade, check out the Recipe Rangers website



# a garlic & olive oil interlude

## beginning with *the Legend of Ajo and Olivia*

They met in Sicily, or so I'm told.

Ajo was a foreigner. A pleasant lad, but scorned for his excessively pale complexion and an odd pointiness of head. Maybe he came down from the north with a horde of other pale-skinned barbarians. Maybe he came from somewhere else. Maybe he was just an albino. Whatever. The important thing was that he was an outcast. And not just because of his unseemly paleness. 'Twas also his fragrance. Ajo reeked with a reek that would make mere pungency hang its head in shame. So he kept to the woods and to himself. Life went on.

One endlessly sunny day Ajo found himself face to face with an odd forest atop a rounded old hill. It seemed a lonely place, but very orderly and well-tended in a very un-forest-like way. And the unfamiliar trees were all of the same breed. They were round-crowned and had narrow oval leaves of a greenish gray color: smooth, but leathery in texture. The trunks were gnarled things with flaky gray bark and knobs and bulges that spoke of great age. Ajo frowned. It was nearly midday and his stomach growled. Were there fruits? Ajo squinted. There. If these were fruits, they were small things and unlike any fruit or nut he knew. Greenish-brown they were.

Ajo plucked one from a handy branch and was about to take a cautious nibble when something stung the back of his neck. He thought to hear a faint sound that might be the titter of a small child, but he could see no one.

The fruit was almost in his mouth once again when another stinging object collided with his cheek. Then another object careened off his ear. Ajo dropped the fruit and ran for cover. His body felt several more hits as he ran.

From behind a pile of boulders some yards away, Ajo peered back toward the grove. Inside, there was movement. A shadowy form flicked from tree to tree. The shadows were deep and he could not tell what it was. Ajo waited and watched.

Presently, the shadowy form dared to venture close to the edge of the grove. Ajo saw a face. A girlish face, but oddly colored: a blend of gray-green and tan with an oily sheen. The hair seemed to be a weave of leaves. Or maybe it was a hair covering of some sort: Ajo had encountered many strange fashions during his travels.

The creature was strange, yes, but from what he could see, not uncomely. The thing seemed to be searching for him. Ajo ducked back behind his boulder, then cautiously peered out again...directly into the eyes of the greenish girl thing.

Their eye contact continued for a long, long moment. Finally Ajo turned away. A mysterious thrill coursed through his body. He shook his head to dislodge it, but it was not located in his head: the thrill remained. The girlish thing had not moved. Ajo ventured a pace forward. The creature remained half concealed behind the outermost tree in the grove, only her



head and arms visible.

When only a few paces separated them, the creature giggled, "Come no further, Aromatic Mortal."

Dutifully, Ajo stopped. "Who are you? What are you?" He had wished to make a more suave response, but was inexperienced in verbal subtleties and could only blurt whatever was at the top of his mind.

"Quite the charmer, aren't you?" giggled the creature. "Well, at least you're honest, so I will answer you in kind. You may call me Olivia. I'm the resident nymph of this grove." The creature sighed and a note of sadness crept into her voice. "I'm the Extra Virgin you may have heard about. That's why I'm stuck up here guarding this old grove. An extra virgin in this land is about as useful as a nose on a stone."

Ajo knew nothing of virgins or virginity, extra or otherwise, but felt a deep empathy for another creature apparently scorned by its fellows. "I'm...I'm sorry," he stammered, unable to think of anything else to say.

The girl-thing nodded and scrutinized Ajo for a time, wriggling her nostrils in an undainty fashion. "You have that haunted look of a wanderer. It's your reek, isn't it? Whew! Ever hear of soap and water? No, forget I said that. Actually, I find your odd pungency somehow invigorating."

Ajo hung his head. He had been the target of barbed comments all the time he had been in this land. And now again. It was time to go. Ajo gave the nymph named Olivia a woeful puppydog glance, then turned and slunk back the way he had come.

"No, wait!" entreated the nymph in her

most musical tones. "I'm sorry I hurt your feelings. We grove-nymphs are always too quick of tongue for our own good. Please come back."

Ajo slowed, but did not turn back.

"Aw, come on back. There's nothing out there for you; you've already been that way. And you haven't even told me your name. Please, I formally apologize for my thoughtless comments. And we grove-nymphs almost never apologize for anything. Believe me."

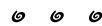
Ajo slowed to a shuffling pace, his sandaled pale feet stirring up eddies of dry dust.

"Look, I'd chase after you but I can't: I'm spellbound to this grove. In other words, I'm stuck here. Don't you want to rescue me, Valiant Savior?" Extra virgin though she be, Olivia was not without nymphian wiles...and not above using them.

Ajo stopped, shrugged, turned and gawked at the slim, somehow slippery shape that gestured to him from the edge of the grove. Nothing wrong with being a Valiant Savior, he decided.

Exactly what happened next is shrouded in propriety. But I can say this: the term "extra virgin" may no longer be applied to Olivia the grove-nymph. I can also assure you that Olivia and Ajo lived happily ever after.

Some say they crossed to the mainland and ended their days in Naples. Others say they're still running a restaurant called Ajo & Olivia's in Palermo. More recently, it's been rumored they're the motive force behind a chain of restaurants called The Stinking Rose. Skeptics say this whole story is Bologna. Your call.



# a garlic & olive oil interlude

continues with **Two Charmed Ingredients**

42

a garlic and olive oil interlude

Magic. Garlic and extra virgin olive oil make magic together, just like Ajo and Olivia. In a bit we'll lay out some simple schmeers — a Yiddish word for a batch of things that go together — built around garlic and extra virgin olive oil. But first, a little about the ingredients.

## THE SHARP FRAGRANCE OF LIFE

Do you remember the nasty Lionel Barrymore character from “It’s a Wonderful Life” disparaging the townfolk as “garlic eaters”? Times have sure changed for garlic, now a darling of the healthy set. Research on the health benefits of garlic is on the rise but this much is pretty certain: garlic can lower cholesterol and protect arteries; thin blood as well as aspirin; block the development of a variety of cancer types; fight various bacterial and viral infections. Because garlic’s chemical constitution is both very complex and very active, the form in which you imbibe garlic has much to do with the health benefits you can derive from it. Raw garlic, for example, is what has the anti-bacterial and anti-viral potency. However, both raw garlic and cooked garlic seem to provide benefits in the cancer fighting and cardiovascular health departments. The bottom line: all garlic — even deodorized garlic pills and the powder in the spice rack — can deliver health benefits. And it’s a wonderful flavoring agent besides.

## BUYING & STORING GARLIC

Supermarkets usually don’t offer a lot of choice in fresh garlic. Maybe we have a choice between “regular” garlic and the milder elephant garlic. This illustrates a garlic rule of thumb: the larger the size the milder the flavor. Regardless of variety, look for large-cloved bulbs that feel firm and solid, not airy, dried out, yellowed or with soft spots. Sprouted cloves are okay to use but may be milder in taste. As for storage, keep it in a cool, dark place. Containers should allow good air circulation. Refrigeration is not recommended, as cloves can quickly become moldy. Freezing is a no-no, as well.

## ENTER THE EXTRA VIRGIN

The current darling of the “healthy” edible oils (high in monounsaturates) is made from the friendly olive. Here’s a primer on selecting and storing the stuff.

Quality in olive oils is all about flavor and aroma. According to international quality standards for olive oil, the extra virgin category must be less than 1% acidity and produced by the first pressing of the green olive fruit using a mechanical cold pressing technique. But this 1% acidity maximum doesn’t tell us anything about the other factors that govern flavor in olive oils: olive variety, growing region, weather, crop condition and ripeness, for example.



**COLOR** — So how does any of that tell you how to select your favorite extra virgin among the several dozen different brands available now on your supermarket shelves? It doesn't. One visual clue is color. Extra virgin oils range from a straw color to a bright green. In general, the deeper the color the more intense (or "fruity") the olive taste.

**PRICE** — Price is another clue, but the highest priced extra virgin oil may or may not taste the best to your taste buds. Learning to detect the subtleties of fine extra virgin oils takes some effort.

**STORY** — In the major olive oil producing countries of the Mediterranean — Greece, Italy, Spain and France — the olive oils of the best small producers are coveted and prized like vintage wines. Many of these growers or grower associations now have websites and some are quite informative and have interesting links to other olive-related sites. You'll learn, for example, that many Greek growers are switching to chemical free "organic" or "biological" production. You'll also read that top quality oils are made from olives picked by hand at just the right moment of ripeness and then pressed in stone presses within 24 hours after picking.

### **OTHER GRADES**

While extra virgin olive oils are preferred for cooking uses that take advantage of the olive's unique flavor and bouquet, other grades have their uses as well.

**LIGHT** — Light in color and flavor only, this class of oils has little or no classic olive oil flavor. Made light by a filtration process, these oils are good for cooking — like baking — where a rich olive bouquet is undesirable. They are also good for high heat cooking because with fewer particulates they produce less smoke. But don't let the "light" name fool you into thinking these oils have fewer calories or lower fat content than other olive oils. They don't.

**VIRGIN** — Also a first-press oil, virgin oils are typically made from riper olives than the extra virgin class and are higher in acidity — 1 to 3%.

**PURE** — This grade is usually now just called "olive oil" and is the "commercial grade" oil. It's typically lighter and less flavorful than other grades, is solvent-extracted instead of pressed and is made from the whole olive: pulp, skins and pits. These products may also be a blend of refined and virgin or extra virgin oils. The "purity" appellation just refers to the fact that it contains no other types of oil (in other words, it's not a blend of olive and, say, canola). When you see olive oil in the ingredients list of a food product this is most likely to be the grade of oil that's included.

### **OLIVE OIL STORAGE**

Olive oils need careful storage to maximize their useful shelf life; you'll be really annoyed if your expensive extra virgin gourmet oil starts tasting rancid. Store in a tightly sealed container in a cool (57° Fahrenheit, 14° Centigrade or lower) dark place for up to six months. You can also refrigerate for up to a year. Refrigeration may cause the oil to thicken and become cloudy, but this won't affect flavor or utility and can add another six months to an oil's flavorful life. To use, just bring it up to room temperature: it will become clear and pourable again. The best containers for olive oils are cans (preferably stainless steel), porcelain and dark-colored glass bottles. Avoid plastic.

# a garlic & olive oil interlude

concludes with *Two Garlic Schmeers*

44

TWO GARLIC SCHMEERS

• • •

## sweet garlic schmeer

If you like the mild, sweet flavor of roasted garlic and want to have it handy to use in recipes, a tub of this stuff ought to be in your refrigerator. This is great to add into a variety of foods or, if you're a real Garlic Person, to eat by the spoonful. A caution: don't stand too close to the mailman immediately afterwards.

### INGREDIENTS

1-4 heads fresh garlic, peeled and run through a garlic press or food processor  
enough fresh, extra virgin olive oil to make a pasty slurry; mix well with your crushed garlic

### PREPARATION

**MICROWAVE METHOD** — Put your raw schmeer into a microwave-safe container and microwave on high power for about a minute. Any more and the garlic will get tough and chewy, which isn't how we want it. Refrigerate in a covered container.

**OVEN METHOD** — Oven-bake the garlic and olive oil uncovered at 250° for about 30 minutes to produce a sweeter, golden-colored schmeer. Stir once or twice during baking. Cover tightly and refrigerate. Keeps up to two weeks or more.

• • •

## power garlic schmeer

If you want to maximize the antibiotic power of garlic in your cooking, you want to minimize cooking. This schmeer lets you always have raw garlic handy. If you have a source of bulk peeled cloves, this schmeer makes good use of a food processor. Add it into sauces, stews and chili or whatever a few minutes before serving.

### INGREDIENTS

1/2 - 1 lbs peeled garlic cloves, chopped fine in a food processor or crushed  
enough fresh, extra virgin olive oil to make a pasty slurry when mixed with your crushed garlic

### PREPARATION

Cover tightly and refrigerate. Keeps up to two weeks or more.

# o - j o e ' s g a r l i c b r e a d

One loaf will feed 2 to 6 people depending on their appetite for garlic bread. The bread, obviously, is a key ingredient, so use the absolutely, positively, very best sourdough bread you can find. Most supermarket sourdough is completely unsatisfactory, e.g.: junk. However, in addition to junk, some supermarkets offer decent sourdoughs by creditable bakeries.

In Southern California, Pioneer, La Brea and San Luis bakeries make decent sourdoughs that are, at this writing, fairly widely available. San Luis and La Brea also offer Rosemary/Olive Oil sourdough loaves that make good garlic slices.

The San Francisco area generally has very good sourdoughs. Specialty bakeries make great fresh sourdoughs and in some upscale districts like Palo Alto/Menlo Park you can also find wonderful sourdoughs at gourmet markets.

## INGREDIENTS

1 fresh sourdough flute or baguette  
fresh, extra virgin olive oil, as needed  
choice of garlic schmeer, as needed (see previous page for preparation)

## PREPARATION

Slice loaf longitudinally as if it were a really long sandwich roll. This should give you a top and a bottom. Partially slit the top and bottom at approximately 1-1/2" sections. Be careful not to slice through the top and/or bottom crust or it will lose structural integrity when grilling. Brush the exposed surfaces of the top and bottom with olive oil. Don't skimp.

## GARLIC APPLICATION AND GRILLING

THEORY 1 — Some folks like their garlic grilled right along with the bread, which gives the garlic a toasty aspect. If you're one of these, apply the garlic schmeer of your choice to the bread and grill it, sliced side down, on a hot skillet. A large, cast iron skillet works best. Some folks apply a weighted pan to the tops of the grilling loaves to ensure even browning. Grill until golden brown and serve.

THEORY 2 — If you prefer the taste of untoasted garlic, grill olive-oil brushed bread first and apply the garlic schmeer just before serving.

## OPTIONAL INGREDIENT

Minced, fresh rosemary (or other aromatic herbs with adequate pungency) added to the garlic paste is an interesting variation.



45

O-JOE'S GARLIC BREAD

