

PERUVIAN BLACK OLIVES

'Aceitunas de Botija'



Olives are entwined with Peru's history and are an integral part of Peruvian flavor. They arrived from Spain with a wealthy colonist who brought olive samplings to plant on his Peruvian farm. They have been cultivated in Peru since 1560, the beginning of Colonial times, and are called Botija Olives for the clay jars (botijas) in which they were stored when olive growing and curing began in Peru in the 16th century. In those days eating olives was a luxury and guests at Peruvian dinner parties were lucky to get one olive at the beginning of a meal. Eventually, it rose to three olives per guest.



Today olives grow bountifully in several parts of Peru and one can still see an ancient olive grove with gnarled old trees in San Isidro, my neighborhood. They are still served with wooden spoons from the botijas for their better preservation.



These large, black, juicy, meaty and flavorful olives are used extensively in Peruvian dishes and are also served as appetizers with cocktails. Olives are used whole or in paste form in sandwiches, are commonly used to garnish emblematic dishes as a briny condiment for savory stews, and paired with sweet raisins, Aji Amarillo (yellow pepper) and more in fillings. They are also the main ingredient in an olive-flavored mayonnaise used in "Olive Octopus," a very popular seafood appetizer and in Olive Rice, a delicious variation of the regular 'arroz a la Peruana.' Black Peruvian olives are not just a condiment, but another example of tradition and a seal of the hybrid characteristic of Peruvian cuisine and identity.

