

Epicurious - Jenny Garing

# Creating the best chilli oil

**Jenny Garing**, linguist, traveller, gourmet, teacher, and the creative force behind Lyttelton's Ground Culinary Centre (destroyed in the February 2011 earthquake) is providing answers for Zest readers' culinary questions, as well as extending her Ground Essentials food products and holding cooking classes.

## Q. Where do I buy, or how do I make chilli oil?

A. You can find Asian chilli oil (usually Chinese) in Asian shops around Christchurch (the Chinese owned ones like SunMart on Blenheim Rd or ChinaTown Market in Upper Riccarton are your best bet). It usually comes in small bottles and is bright red and quite cheap. It is also very hot. The European version is found in delis and specialty food stores like Aji's, Mercato or Mediterranean Food Co. It comes in bigger, more expensive bottles and isn't as hot. The difference apart from the heat factor is the base oil. The European variety uses olive oil as a base, whereas the Asian ones use a vegetable oil such as soya or rice-bran oil. As such, the European style is generally used more as a dressing or added at the last moment to cooking. The Asian chilli oil is used more at the beginning of cooking. You make flavoured oils the same way you would flavoured vinegars; by macerating. Use any sort of fresh, dried or smoked chillies (whole, not powdered) and any sort of light-flavoured olive oil or other flavourless vegetable oil. Add your chillies to the oil and keep the bottle in a warm place but not in direct sunlight. It should take a couple of weeks, but test occasionally for strength. If at the end of two weeks it is not strong enough, strain it and add new chillies. When it is at the desired

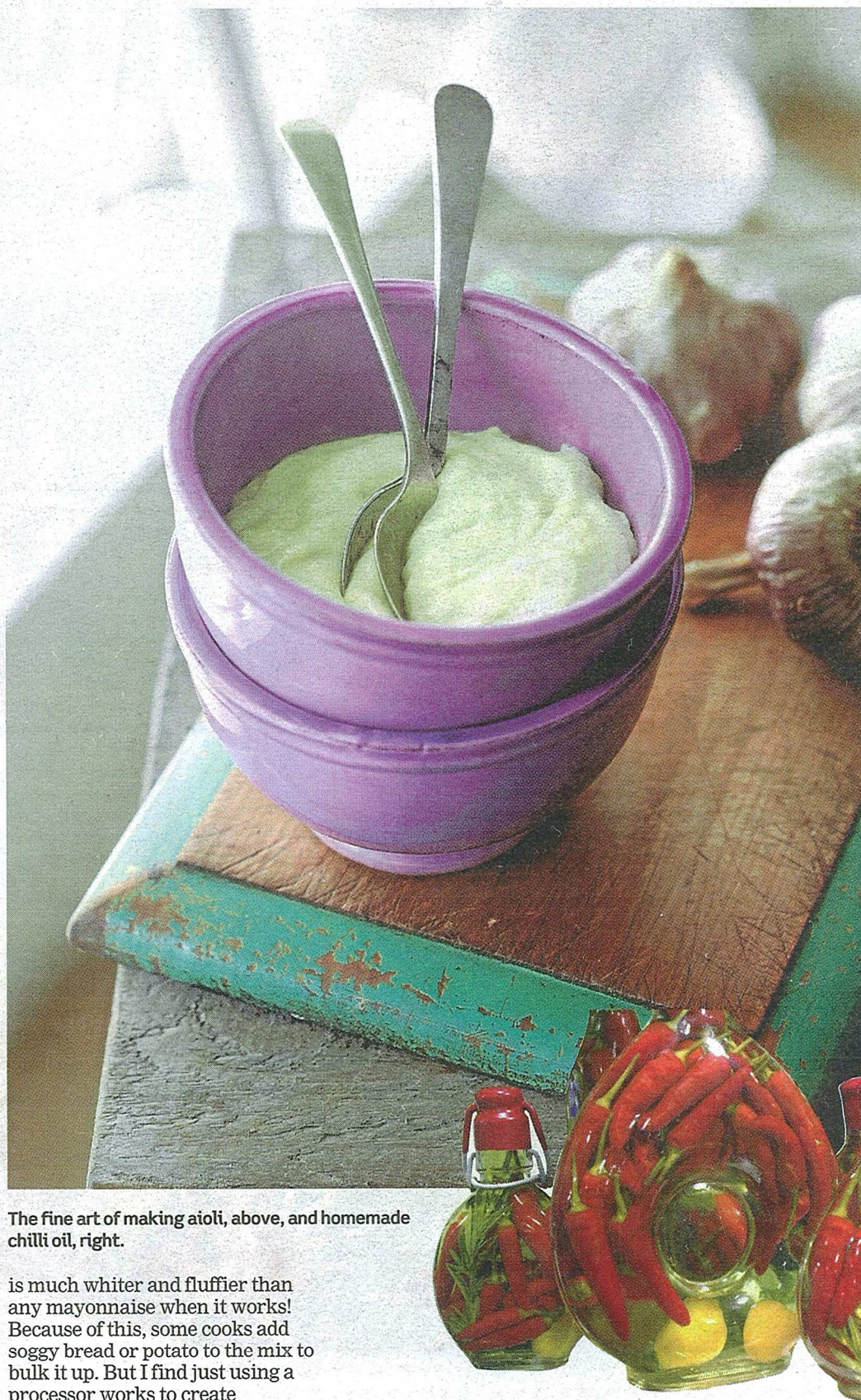
strength strain the oil, throw away the chillies and re-bottle. For a nice Mexican twist, you could add lime zest to the oil as well as chillies. Flavoured oils are only limited by your imagination; mandarin or lemon zest oil is great with seafood, basil or rosemary oil is lovely on salads or with cheese dishes. Think of flavoured oils and vinegars as the keys of a piano in your kitchen. With their immediate hit of bright flavours added to fresh ingredients you can easily play an old favourite.

## Q. What is the difference between aioli and allioli? To make my own aioli/allioli can I just add garlic to my mayonnaise?

A. Allioli is the Catalan version of the French aioli. In Catalan language "all" is garlic, "i" is salt and "oli" is olive oil. Both aioli and allioli are traditionally made with just garlic, salt and oil, whereas mayonnaise has egg yolk in it. The egg in mayonnaise is used to emulsify the oil and create the thick creamy texture. As such, many people are scared of making allioli as there is no egg, and the result is dependent on the skill of the cook, as it is a case of beating the oil and garlic together correctly (it helps to first make the garlic all unctuous or silky in a mortar and pestle). The Lebanese version - toum - includes lemon juice as well, but

The fine art of making aioli, above, and homemade chilli oil, right.

is much whiter and fluffier than any mayonnaise when it works! Because of this, some cooks add soggy bread or potato to the mix to bulk it up. But I find just using a processor works to create great allioli or toum with just the genuine ingredients of garlic, oil and salt - a creamy, rich and incredibly smooth garlicky sauce.  
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