



OLIVE GROWING ON LAKE COMO

You can find this point of interest in Ossuccio - Path 1 - Stage 1

DESCRIPTION

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The territory of Lake Como is part of the Distretto Floristico Insubrico (*Insubric Region Floral District*), covering the area from Lake Garda to Lake Maggiore.

The presence of great lakes, including Lake Como, has a mitigating effect on winter and summer temperatures, reducing seasonal thermal excursions as the mass of water acts as a thermal accumulator, which heats, and loses heat, at a slower rate. The mild climate favours the growth of plant species which are typical of sub-Mediterranean and Mediterranean environments, such as laurel and nettle trees. Other tree species present on the Comacina Island are black hornbeam, chestnut tree, and limetree. This spontaneous vegetation is often coupled with olive trees, at the northern limit of its cultivation environment, which gives a Mediterranean touch to the landscape, due to the beauty of its elegant posture and its chromatic tones. The old olive trees, with their silver grey leafy fronds, contribute in creating that picturesque, almost magical, atmosphere which is typical of many views on the banks of Lake Como. Unsurprisingly, the area at the centre of Lake Como between the villages of Lenno and Sala Comacina is known as the *Zoca de l'oli (Oil Basin)*.

Tradition has it that the olive tree reached the area of Lake Como about 2000 years ago, brought by Greek settlers who arrived in Italy with Julius Caesar, and would have then be cultivated almost everywhere during Roman occupation. Poet Claudian (4th-5th century AD), was so fascinated by his visit to the shores of Lake Como that he wrote: «*There, where Lake Como covers its shores with shady trees and imitates the waves of the sea with its sweet waters*». Again according to tradition, even the Lombard Court of Queen Theodelinda used to take in supplies of Lake Como oil. Other sources refer that the oil of the *Zoca de l'oli*, not only supplied the many abbeys of the area (including S. Benedetto - St. Benedict - and Acquafredda), but was transported by mules across the entire Grisons on the wine route, and then taken to Austria from St. Moritz. Therefore, in the past, olive growing – albeit with its highs and lows - was not only a food source for coastal populations, but a very important element for their economy and welfare.

Quite recently, in 1997, in order to protect, promote and make the most of this local produce, Lake Como olive growers obtained from the European Union a Protected Designation of Origin for the “Laghi Lombardi – Lario” (“Lakes of Lombardy – Lake Como”) extra-virgin olive oil. To bear this title oil producers must comply with strict rules regarding the location of manufacture, the varieties which can be grown, the growing and transformation conditions, and the minimum quality parameters of the oil so obtained. Lately Lake Como oil has been requested by an increasing number of connoisseurs and experts, by local restaurants, and even by the owners of the olive groves, who are very proud of this produce.