



Olives from Crete

bring them good health and flavourful food year round, from olives and olive oil. The city declared Athena had won and chose the name of Athens," said Loi.

Much has been said of the benefits of olive oil: from lowering blood pressure and cholesterol, to providing healthy fats, to improving brain health. It is chock full of antioxidants; Greek olive oil in particular, Loi pointed out, has more polyphenols than any other European olive oil.

As for whole olives themselves, they are a good source of iron and vitamin A and help increase serotonin levels. They also aid in weight loss and maintaining gastrointestinal health. "They are full of all the same vitamins, nutrients and benefits that olive oil is known for, and come in a delicious bite-sized treat," Loi said.

Olives and olive oil

The advent of the olive tree, in ancient Greek mythology, came as a result of a competition between Poseidon, god of the sea and horses, and Athena, goddess of wisdom.

Vying to name Greece's new capital, each gave a useful gift to its citizens. Poseidon gave warhorses and struck his trident into the ground; seawater sprang forth. Athena struck a rock with her spear and an olive tree grew there. The people "knew the olive tree would

Honey

"Honey is perhaps the all-time, ultimate superfood, and in fact was considered the 'food of the gods'," Loi said. "It has antibacterial, antifungal, anti-septic, antioxidant properties - it never goes bad and is the best possible preservative!"

She notes that the pollen and royal jelly, present in raw honey, are what give honey its health benefits, but much of the honey on supermarket shelves has been filtered to remove these, "leaving it a shell of the superfood it could be".

Honey is not only a natural antibiotic but also increases calcium absorption, boosts energy, can be used to treat anaemia and as a gentle laxative, and is full of minerals that are critical for blood sugar balance.



Barley rusks (Dakos)

This humble food has its roots as a practical food for men going off to sea or into the fields for weeks at a time. The ancient name for rusks, says Loi, is "dipyritis artos", or twice-baked bread. With the moisture baked out of them, these rusks could last for weeks and be rehydrated while voyaging by, for example, dipping them into the sea.

"Cretan barley rusks are delicious, with their slightly nutty flavour and varying textures (depending on the liquid introduced to them), and moreover, [they are] extremely healthy," said Loi.

Full of dietary fibre, they also help intestinal and liver function.



Cretan barley rusks (dakos) are full of dietary fibre

Mountain tea (Sideritis, Malotira)

Malotira, Loi notes, is the mountain tea specific to Crete. Rich in iron, flavonoids and antioxidants, it has been used to treat wounds since ancient times, reduces inflammation in the gastrointestinal tract and is great during the cold season. It boosts immunity, reduces fevers, has calming properties and has been used as a sleep aid.



The discovery of sea buckthorn's benefits dates back millennia.

Sea buckthorn (Hippophae)

The discovery of sea buckthorn berries might have been a happy accident. Containing over 60 antioxidants, healthy fatty acids and at least 20 minerals, the berries are known to treat gastrointestinal disorders including ulcers, improve the look of skin and hair, improve sight and mental clarity, slow the ageing process, and contribute to proper brain and nervous system functioning.



Vasilopita, a cake made with mastiha

Mastic (Mastiha)

Produced on the island of Chios, mastic resin is used in a variety of ways: not only in toothpaste and chewing gum (as it's known to be good for dental health) but also in foods as a flavouring agent, much as vanilla might be used in baked goods, or sweetened and mixed with cold water for a refreshing drink in the summer.

"The first-century Greek physician Pedanius Dioscorides mentions the healing properties of mastic in his book *De Materia Medica*," said Loi. "Hippocrates wrote that mastic is good for the prevention of digestive problems and colds, and Galenus suggested that mastic was useful for bronchitis and for improving the condition of the blood."

It's also known to be good for improving digestion, lowering cholesterol and preventing glaucoma.



Trahana (Xinohondros)

Trahana is made from a dehydrated mixture of wheat and fermented cow's, sheep's or goat's milk (or buttermilk or yogurt). Prescribed by Hippocrates for intestinal problems, it is rich in carbohydrates, high in fibre and full of lactobacilli from the sour milk - making it beneficial for the digestive tract. It also contains protein, magnesium, iron, phosphorus and calcium in a form the body can easily absorb.

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