



SA Olive Awards 2026 Competition Judging Procedure

1. PURPOSE

The purpose of this document is to define the Competition Judging Procedure for the 2026 SA Olive Industry Association Annual Awards (SA Olive Awards).

2. SCOPE

This procedure is applicable to all entries registering for the 2026 SA Olive Awards, the judging panel and the appointed service providers.

3. PRINCIPLES

- All entries will be anonymised according to a coding system known only to the organiser.
- All oils shall be received, always stored and handled completely out of sight of the judges.
- The procedure for assessing the organoleptic characteristics of extra virgin olive oils and classifying oils based on such characteristics follows the method determined by the International Olive Council (IOC).
- During the judging, all samples will be covered and numbered to conceal any possible identification.
- Should a judge enter the preparation room where samples may be visible, he/she shall immediately be removed from further judging for the competition.
- No person who has knowledge of the identity of any entry shall be permitted to pass judgement on any entry in the competition.
- Members of the media and an appointed photographer may be allowed in the tasting venue for a limited period specified by SA Olive.
- SA Olive will appoint an auditor to verify that the entries and judging process comply with the 2026 Competition Rules and Regulations, and that the results are accurate.
- Competition results will be disclosed to the SA Olive CEO after completion of the audit.

4. FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT

A) TASTING VENUE

- The tasting venue is designed to provide the judging panel with a suitable, comfortable, controlled environment with facilities that help to improve the repeatability and reproducibility of the results.
- The venue will be equipped with air conditioning to keep the temperature close to 20-25°C.
- No odours, noises or conversations from adjacent areas will disturb the judging panel while at work.

B) TASTING GLASSES

- The oils shall be judged using coloured glasses, which conform to the International Olive Council regulation COI/T.20/Doc. no. 5/Rev 2 2020.
- The glasses shall be cleaned using unperfumed detergent before being rinsed repeatedly until the cleaning agent has been eliminated.
- Each glass and lid shall be marked with the predetermined code, using an odour free marking system.
- A volume of 14 – 16 ml of olive oil (or 12,8 to 14,6 g if the samples were weighed) will be poured in each glass, and the glass shall be covered with a lid to prevent the loss of aroma and the entry of dust.
- The oil samples intended for tasting shall be kept in the glasses at $28^{\circ}\text{C} \pm 2^{\circ}\text{C}$ throughout the judging.

C) OIL SAMPLE HEATING BATHS

- Tasting glasses containing oils to be assessed will be kept in specialised baths for heating oil samples, featuring:
 - Temperature control from ambient temperature $+5^{\circ}\text{C}$ up to 30°C
 - A safety thermostat
 - 3 digits temperature display; resolution $0,1^{\circ}\text{C}$
 - Special cavities designed by IOC according to EU N° L.248/67 standards
 - Manufactured under EC directives

D) ACCESSORIES

The following accessories, which are required by judges to perform their task properly, shall be supplied in each booth and be within easy reach of the judges:

- A profile sheet on hard copy, or on soft copy - provided that the conditions of the profile sheet are met - together with the instructions for its use if necessary.
- A pencil and ballpoint pen.
- An apple, a knife, water biscuits or ciabatta bread and plain yogurt.
- Carbonated water and still water at ambient temperature.
- Sheet recalling the general rules.
- Spittoons

5. PROCEDURE FOR JUDGING AND USE OF THE SCORE SHEET

- Judging shall start daily at 9.30 am and end no later than 16.00 pm. Every effort will be made to ensure that no more than 20 oils per day are presented to each judge, however there may be instances in which a higher number of oils will need to be tasted.
- Judges shall not smoke or drink coffee at least 30 minutes before the starting time of the tasting nor during the tasting. In addition, they should fast for at least one hour before the tasting.
- They must not have used any fragrance, cosmetic or soap with lingering smell. They will use an unperfumed soap to wash their hands which they shall then rinse and dry as often as necessary to eliminate any smell.

- Judges must keep their mobile phones always switched off to avoid interfering with the concentration and work of their colleagues.
- When judges have complied with the above, they shall take their place in the booth allocated to them in an orderly and quiet manner. Communication between judges will only be allowed once score sheets have been handed in.
- All oils shall be presented to the judges blindly, without any information on producer's name, product name, brand, cultivars or region of origin.
- Each judge shall smell and then taste the oil contained in the blue glass to analyse the olfactory, gustatory, qualitative retro-nasal and tactile sensations. They shall then enter their scores for each oil sample in the score sheet provided.
- The tasting sheet shall be the official SA Olive Awards sheet (attached Annexure A) and there will be only one sheet per sample per judge.
- No judge will be allowed to leave the tasting venue until the current score sheet is handed over to the Panel Leader.
- The Panel Leader is responsible for the performance of the judging panel and for ensuring that assessments are supported by reliable, objective proof.
- The Panel Leader will taste each oil with the judges to ensure that their scoring is aligned.
- Each entry will be tasted once, except if the Panel Leader requires a re-assessment.
- The Panel Leader - or someone appointed by the Panel Leader - shall enter the scores of each judge in a computer programme which will record the results of the assessment based on the calculation of the median of the individual scores.
- The Panel Leader shall review the intensities assigned to the different attributes. Should he/she find any anomalies, he/she shall invite the judges to revise their score sheets and, if necessary, repeat the tasting.
- The Panel Leader holds ultimate responsibility for keeping the records of the judging panel.
- Records must be traceable and comply with the assurance and quality requirements laid down in international sensory analysis standards. Records will ensure the anonymity of the samples.
- The twenty highest scoring oils which qualify for gold medals will be re-tasted in a subsequent session and a new score will be allocated.
- The oils with the ten highest scores (no more than one per producer) will receive the Absa Top 10 Olive Oil Awards 2026, which will be announced at a special event hosted by Absa.

6. JUDGING PANEL

- The CEO of SA Olive is the Convener of the judging panel. The 2026 judging panel includes two International Judge, Panel leader and local judges. In total 7 judges and one panel leader will make up the judging panel of 8 in 2026.
- The local judges are qualified experts in the field of sensory analysis who are regularly exposed to oils from all around South Africa and part of the CTC Tasting panel.
- Criteria for selection of the local judging panel include independence, qualifications, ability, experience and track record. Judges shall be reimbursed for travel expenses and receive a fee determined by SA Olive.
- Judges are expected to uphold the principles of fairness, independence and confidentiality.
- If necessary, depending on the number of oils entered, SA Olive may establish more than one judging panel, and each panel shall consist of one Panel Leader and an equal number of judges.

- The judging panel's ruling is final and binding on participants and no correspondence shall be entered into.

7. DISCLOSURE OF JUDGES' CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

- All judges are required to provide full disclosure of any relevant industry involvement or relationships (attached Annexure B).
- Further to the above, SA Olive producers have a responsibility to notify the SA Olive CEO promptly if an individual appointed to the judging panel has been advising them or other entrants on olive oil production, quality or blending.

8. REVIEW AND FEEDBACK

The SA Olive Awards aim to support and promote quality awareness. For this purpose, judges are required to enter comments on each oil. These comments shall be reviewed by the Panel Leader and made available to the CEO for feedback to producers.

9. APPOINTED SERVICE PROVIDER

SA Olive has appointed Blue Tulip to assist with the arrangements and logistics of the judging, according to the detail outlined in this document. Blue Tulip will be responsible for the serving and storage of the oils during the judging period.

10. COMPETITION SAMPLES

Once the judging is concluded, all oil samples shall remain the property of SA Olive. No sample shall be sold to any third party.

SOURCES:

www.internationaloliveoil.org

International Olive Council: COI/T.20.Doc. No 15/Rev. 10	Sensory Analysis of Olive Oil: Method for the organoleptic assessment of virgin olive oil
International Olive Council: COI/T.20.Doc. No 4/Rev. 1	Sensory Analysis of Olive Oil: Standard Sensory Analysis General Basic Vocabulary
International Olive Council: COI/T.20.Doc. No 6/Rev. 1	Sensory Analysis of Olive Oil: Standard Guide for the installation of a test room
International Olive Council: COI/T.20.Doc. No 14/Rev. 7	Sensory Analysis of Olive Oil: Guide for the selection, training and quality control of virgin olive oil tasters
International Olive Council: COI/T.20.Doc. No 5/Rev.	Sensory Analysis of Olive Oil: Glass for oil tasting

If there are any questions pertaining to this procedure, please let us know.