

## **PRESS RELEASES**

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**Title** : Well oiled

A brand new palm cooking oil variant that looks and feels like olive oil but it's not. Theresa Manavalan is thrilled to discover that it has absolutely no smell or taste.

Let's begin with a confession of my fondness for complications. Ismail, the friendly fishmonger at Petaling Jaya's Old Town Market, tells me I'm only the only customer who has ever asked him to butterfly fresh sardines.

He starts with an "Oh Kak..." kind of whine but does a great job of it anyway. His bright eyes are darting about the busy market but he's heard every word about my plan to serve Bay of Bengal sardines. I know he'll ask me about it too, next time I'm there.

On the phone, my Auntie Rita warns me that they might not be sardines, rather they may be scad, a similar-looking small fish with an entirely different flavor scope. Use a fleshier fish, she advises, if you're going to grill it.

I've chosen sardines simply because they've got a distinct flavor and an unmistakable aroma that charges the nose the moment they're cooked. You must, at this point, understand that sardines in tins bear absolutely no resemblance to fresh ones. I need an individualistic fish because I'm grilling them with Novelin, a brand new palm oil variant that I'm testing.

It looks like olive oil, it feels like olive oil, but it's not olive oil. It does everything that olive oil does except deliver that particular flavor of the Mediterranean. Novelin is literally flavourless and odourless – qualities that would eventually send me to sardine heaven.

It greases the hotplate gracefully, with absolutely no aroma of its own to steal the thunder from the fish rubbed with chili and turmeric in its searing ikan bakar moment.

The sardines, grilled crisp with no sign of oil, go out with cherry tomatoes and mesclun lightly dressed in old-fashioned balsamic vinegar, Novelin and wave of sea salt.

Oh, I like this – it's as if there's only the vinegar and salt. The oil hovers in the distant background of taste – and the shredded ginger flower sprinkled into this salad zooms straight to the foreground.

This is interesting.

In search of drama, I boil potatoes, you know, those nondescript ones found in every Malaysian grocery that are born for chicken curry. Cut into wedges and brushed in Novelin. I stick them in the oven with roasting chicken pieces. They crisp efficiently in 200 C, the edges browned and inviting. And that, it turns out, is the hottest item in the line-up at dinner. The potato, says the spouse, tastes like real potato. Oh.

So, Novelin knows it's the hired help? That its job is to provide cooking fat, not seize the entire taste spectrum. This makes it a great cooking oil because it will always allow the natural perfumes of herbs and spices dance through the true taste of food.

Novelin, a blend of palm oil and other vegetable oils, is Malaysia's newest oil, launches last Thursday. Developed by the Malaysian Palm Oil Board and now manufactured by Ace Edible Oils, Novelin was designed specifically for export to cold countries.

Beating the cold weather has always been a challenge for the palm oil industry because classic palm oil congeals in the cold. We've all seen it happen in our fridges. It goes to Japan and Korea by Christmas, and next year, it will go to Europe, the US and possibly, be sold here too.

## **Excellent for deep-frying**

I like olive oil but it isn't any good for deepfrying. With its smoke point hovering around 200 C, all I get is a misty vision and a really oily residue I have to scrape off the walls. Because of this, I seldom ever deepfry food.

So I want to know if Novelin can beat that.

I marinate chicken wings in Worcestershire sauce with salt and pepper. An hour later, I'm ready to fry.

The wok heated, I pour in Novelin. Hey, no smoke. That's wonderful. But I'm also missing the aroma of the usual brand of blended cooking oil I use for deepfrying.

I put the chicken in and about two minutes later, an appetizing smell fills the kitchen. Littlest Princess runs in, distracted from her homework by the smell, and impatiently demands to know if dinner would be ready soon.

The chicken wings brown beautifully and I remove them onto a plate. The odourless oil doesn't seem to make the chicken any less tasty.

In fact, it seems to allow the taste and flavor of Worcestershire sauce to shine through more acutely.

Having wolfed down dinner, Littlest Princess licks her fingers clean and says, “Ma, can we have this again tomorrow?” – By Tan Bee Hong