Chios Mastiha. The tear that comforts.
Chios Mastiha, a PDO product


“Protected designation of origin – PDO” is the name of a specific region or in extraordinary cases the name of a country, which is used in the description of an agricultural product or a food originating from that specific location or country. The quality or characteristics of the above are mainly or exclusively due to the geographical environment, including the natural and human factors and the production, alteration and process which take place in the delimited geographical area.

Since 1997, Chios mastiha has been identified as Protected Designation of Origin product (PDO), subject to the EU Regulation No. 123/1997 (L0224/24-1/97) and has been registered in the relevant community list of the PDO products.

All protected designation of origin products bear the PDO mark.

The PDO designation for agricultural products and foodstuff allows growers to promote these products more easily, at the same time allowing consumers to buy quality products, whose production, process and origination are guaranteed.

The registered names for PDO products are protected against any direct or indirect commercial use of other products, which are not compliant with the specifications (on PDO products), as well as against any expropriation, imitation, insinuation, false or deceitful indication as regards the origin, derivation or nature of a product. Moreover, registered names protect products against any practice, which might mislead the public about the actual origin of a product.

Apart from the PDO products, the European Union has created the PGI (Protected Geographical Indication) and TSG (Traditional Speciality Guaranteed) systems. More specifically:

A “Protected Geographical Indication – PGI” covers the name of a specific region or, in extraordinary cases, the name of a country, used in the description of an agricultural product or foodstuff originating from this specific location or country. The quality, fame or other characteristics of the above are due to this geographical origin, the production and/or alteration and/or processing of which take place in a delimited geographical area.

A “Traditional Speciality Guaranteed - TSG” corresponds to products of alteration, characterized by their composition or method of preparation. The composition and method of preparation of these products have not been changed for ages and integrate the history, customs and tradition of the people who produce such products. They are based on the tradition and the alimentary culture of the European citizens while they bear and present those special characteristics which are due to the soil-climatic conditions of the cultivation area and to the special production and alteration conditions.
Chios and the Mastiha tree

Chios is one of the largest Aegean islands, well known for its gentle climate, beautiful pebble beaches and numerous historical sites. Other reasons for its popularity as a summer destination include the kindness and hospitality of its inhabitants, the fragrant orange groves and the flowery meadows where hundreds of tulips bloom every spring. By far the most significant reason that Chios has been renowned since ancient times, however, are the mastic trees in the south of the island and the resin obtained from their bark.

This is where we find the 24 ‘Mastichohoria’ (mastic-producing villages) of the island, many of which have retained their medieval character, with a high tower prominent at the centre and the houses built one against the other to form a fortress wall, originally meant to protect the village from pirates. Every year, at the end of the summer, the narrow village streets with their characteristic arches exude the wonderful aroma of the mastic kept in the storehouses, whilst during winter the nights come alive with the traditional songs which rhythmically accompany the sorting of the precious ‘tears’.

The mastic tree (Pistacia lentiscus var. chia) is a variety of a Mediterranean shrub. The tree flourishes throughout Chios, but there have been successful efforts for its cultivation in many other areas as well. However, it is only in the south of the island that the ‘tears’ of resin exuded from the tree set and dry on exposure to air, to form mastic. We do not know the precise reasons why this area, heavily planted with the mastic tree, has this particular advantage, but it is certain that its inhabitants have known how to exploit it for thousands of years.

Great care is still required nowadays for the obtainment of mastic, since very few things have changed over the centuries in the cultivation of the mastic tree. First of all, many preparatory works need to be done before the bark of the tree is incised with a special tool, a process which is repeated several times through the summer. When the resin that has seeped on to the bark in the form of ‘tears’ sets and solidifies into chunks, it is collected by hand and the women undertake the most arduous task of mastic production, the careful washing and cleaning of the valuable mastic, piece by piece.

In turn, the final product of the family toil goes to the Chios Gum Mastic Growers Association, who collect the sum of mastic production and then further process and package it. The Association distributes various categories of mastic (flat chunks and large or small tears) internationally, as well as ‘ELMA’ chewing gum, mastic oil, mastic-flavoured water and gum mastic powder. The latter is mainly used in confectionery and cooking, lately, however, it has also been used for medicinal purposes, following the recent discovery that mastic has a therapeutic effect on peptic ulcers. A significant part of the sun-born mastic collected each year is burned as incense mainly in Arabic countries, its sweet-smelling smoke boosting feelings of optimism and, allegedly, offering joy to those who inhale it. Finally, considerable quantities of mastic are used to scent liqueurs, perfumes, breads and sweets, thus seducing its millions of devotees throughout the world.
Chios Mastiha, a precious health and beauty ally

Chios mastic has been greatly sought after since antiquity for its unique scent and therapeutic properties. Because at the time it was believed—and rightly so—that beauty was closely connected to health, mastic soon acquired the reputation of an important ally to the latter. In the 1st century A.D., Dioscorides, the renowned pharmacologist of antiquity, lists all therapeutic and cosmetic properties of mastic known at the time in his De Materia Medica (About Medical Substances) treatise: “It’s good for the stomach,” he writes, “and is added to teeth cleaning remedies and face creams, because it promotes skin radiance, can be used to stick back fallen eyelashes and, when chewed, helps scent breath and strengthens the gums.” Apparently, Dioscourides was also familiar with the properties of the mastic oil, about which he notes that, among its numerous medical uses, “it cleanses the face and gives it the color of health.” During the peak of the Roman Empire, upper class ladies used beauty creams which contained mastic and frequently relied on the aromatic toothpicks made from the wood of the mastic tree to preserve the health and whiteness of their teeth.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that, in later antiquity, mastic was considered a panacea, which is why the writings of the most renowned physicians of the time contain numerous references to its therapeutic properties, mainly with regards to stomach upsets and the health of the oral cavity. Apart from relieving ailments, mastic was used to enhance the mood, stimulate sexual desire, promote sleep and, naturally, to preserve or restore beauty. During the first centuries of the Byzantine Empire, mastic was an indispensable ingredient of the most expensive scented soaps, but was also reputed to provide protection from sunrays and was thus used in sun protection preparations as well. In their writings, royal court physicians such as Aëtius Amidenus and Oribasius include recipes for the production of pomades which promoted a radiant and youthful skin for women, albeit exclusively for those lucky enough to be able to pay dearly for its acquisition, as the price of mastic remained forbiddingly high for common people.

Following the occupation of Chios by the Turks, a large amount of top quality mastic ended up in the Sultan’s Palace in Constantinople, while the second class quality was sent to the Royal Harems of Cairo. Throughout the empire, mastic was offered on a tray during women’s gatherings, since it was common knowledge that chewing mastic was the best way to clean their teeth, strengthen their gums and scent their breath. Naturally, all men of the time (but also modern men as well) recognized that the qualities promoted by Chios mastic, namely a radiant complexion and a fresh, scented breath, are particularly desirable in women...
The many uses of Chios Mastiha in modern cosmetology

The ancient belief that mastic possesses therapeutic and cosmetic properties is now backed by contemporary scientific research. Understandably, international interest for this precious resin from the island of Chios is growing year after year. So far, a series of studies has proved mastic’s contribution to the prevention of bacterial development in the oral cavity and of bacterial plaque. It is therefore used in many toothpastes and mouthwash solutions to promote fresh breath and prevent decay.

Modern cosmetology has started to utilize the clinically tested and proved antimicrobial, antioxidant, anti-inflammatory and healing properties of mastic by making use of its essential oil. Cosmetics which are enriched with mastic oil ensure in-depth skin care and offer anti-ageing protection. At the same time, by controlling the excretion of sebum, mastic oil-based cosmetics significantly reduce problems associated with oily skin, such as a shiny appearance. Because collagen production is boosted, frequent use helps soften lines and wrinkles, and ensures greater elasticity. Mastic oil also improves the appearance of photoaged skin and deeply moisturizes, while it is beneficial for skin types prone to acne or black spots. As a conclusion, cosmetics containing mastic give both face and body a youthful and healthy appearance, thus confirming ancient beliefs regarding the beneficial contribution of Chios resin to beauty.

You can best benefit from the beauty-enhancing properties of mastic ‘tears’, by making the cosmetics best suited to your skin type and your individual needs yourselves. In the following pages you will find several tried and tested recipes, chosen by virtue of their simplicity and availability of ingredients. Offer yourself a complete beauty treatment based on mastic and you will soon join the leagues of its loyal devotees.

Although it has been clinically proved that skin irritations or other unwanted reactions are almost never caused by cosmetics containing mastic or mastic oil, please do note that it would be wise to do the following simple test to exclude the possibility of an allergic or hypersensitivity reaction: dilute a drop of mastic oil within a teaspoonful of vegetable oil and rub the blend on the inner part of your elbow. Check the skin after 24 hours for irritations, redness, or itchiness. In the unlikely event that such reactions should occur, please refrain from making and using cosmetics containing mastic or mastic oil.
Chios Mastiha Oil Facial Steam
For very oily skins or skins with acne

Pour boiling water into a bowl and add 3 drops mastic oil. Lower your face over the bowl and put a towel on your head so that it covers the bowl completely, not allowing the steam to escape. Close your eyes and keep your face over the hot steam, maintaining a comfortable distance, for about 5’. Afterwards, dab your face with a cotton pad moistened with ½ teaspoon rose water, ½ teaspoon lemon juice and 1 drop mastic oil to help shrink enlarged skin pores.

Chios Mastiha Exfoliate

1 tablespoon French Green Clay *
1 teaspoon mastic
1 egg white
1 teaspoon lemon juice (for oily skins) or
1 teaspoon lavender or chamomile oil (for normal-dry skins)

Thoroughly grind the mastic into a fine powder using a pestle and mortar, and mix with the rest of the ingredients until you have a thick paste. Wet your face and gently rub it with the paste using circular movements, avoiding the eye area. Let it act for 5’ and then rinse your face thoroughly with lukewarm water. Your skin will feel soft, smooth and more youthful. Use up to twice a week.

* If your skin is very oily, replace French Green Clay with Fuller’s Earth which is particularly effective in absorbing oiliness.
**Chios Mastiha Oil Mask**
*For oily skins or skins with acne*

1 tablespoon full-fat yogurt  
½ tablespoon rice flour  
3 drops mastic oil

Mix well all ingredients and apply the mask on thoroughly cleaned and dry face, avoiding the eye area. Let it act for 20’ and rinse with lukewarm water. Use up to 3 times a week.

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**Chios Mastiha Oil Mask**
*For dry, dehydrated or wrinkled skins*

1 teaspoon thin honey  
2 drops mastic oil

Mix honey and mastic oil well. Apply the mask on a thoroughly cleaned and dry face and cover each eye with a slice of fresh cucumber. Lie down with a towel under your head to avoid staining your clothes and allow the mask to act for 20’. Rinse well with lukewarm water. Use up to twice a week. For more immediate and spectacular results, add ½ gr. of royal jelly into the mixture.
Chios Mastiha Oil Moisturizer
For all skin types

1 tablespoon grated beeswax
4 tablespoons apricot kernel oil
2 tablespoons rose water
10 drops mastic oil

Warm the rose water. Melt the beeswax in a bowl held over (but not touching) a pan of boiling water, add the apricot kernel oil and stir well until lump-free. Remove from heat and gradually add the rose water, stirring the mixture constantly. When the mixture starts to thicken, add the mastic oil, stir well and transfer into a tight-lidded, screw-top jar. Use this rich, nourishing and balancing moisturizer after your morning or evening face cleansing routine. It will keep in the fridge for at least two months.
Chios Mastiha Oil Anti-wrinkle & Anti-ageing Night Face Cream

1 tablespoon grated beeswax
15 g cocoa butter
30 ml avocado oil
10 ml wheat germ oil
50 ml rosewater
10 drops mastic oil
10 drops neroli essential oil

Gently warm the rose water. Melt the beeswax and the cocoa butter in a bowl held over (but not touching) a pan of boiling water, add the avocado and wheat germ oil and stir well until lump-free. Remove from heat and gradually add the rose water, stirring the mixture constantly. When the mixture starts to thicken, add the mastic oil and the neroli essential oil, stir well and transfer into a tight-lidded, screw-top jar. Use this rich, anti-wrinkle, anti-ageing night cream after your evening face cleansing routine. It will keep in the fridge for at least two months.
**Chios Mastiha Oil Toothpaste**

1 tablespoon sodium bicarbonate
1 tablespoon vegetable glycerine
10 drops mastic oil

Mix well sodium bicarbonate with vegetable glycerine and add the mastic oil. Put mixture in a tight-lidded jar and keep out of fridge. Use morning and evening to freshen your breath, strengthen your gums and protect teeth from decay.

**Chios Mastiha Oil Mouthwash**

50 ml green tea
2 drops mastic oil

Mix ingredients well and use to rinse your mouth after meals or after brushing your teeth. Do not swallow. The fluoride contained in the green tea, combined with the mastic oil’s antibacterial action, strengthen the gums, help prevent tooth decay and leave your breath fresh and fragrant.
Chios Mastiha Body Scrub

2 tablespoons sweet almond oil

1 tablespoon sea salt

1 tablespoon mastic

Thoroughly grind the mastic into a fine powder using a pestle and mortar and mix with the rest of the ingredients. Take a shower and rub the scrub on your wet skin from feet upwards with gentle, circular movements. Pay particular attention to trouble areas such as feet, elbows, legs, hands or back, but avoid applying to irritated or scratched skin. Rinse well with warm water, finish off with a dry-towel rub, and apply your favorite body lotion. Your skin will feel soft and radiant. Use once a week.
Chios Mastiha Oil Hand Softening Cream

1 teaspoon grated beeswax
40 ml sweet almond oil
40 ml rose water
5 drops mastic oil
5 drops lemon essential oil

Warm the rose water. Melt the beeswax in a bowl held over (but not touching) a pan of boiling water, add the sweet almond oil and stir well until lump-free. Remove from heat and gradually add the rose water, stirring the mixture constantly. When the mixture starts to thicken, add the mastic oil and the lemon essential oil, stir well, and transfer into a tight-lidded, screw-top jar. Used regularly, this softening and moisturizing hand cream will also whiten your hands and help eliminate age spots. It will keep in the fridge for at least two months.
Chios Mastiha Oil Milk Bath

1 cup full-fat milk
1 teaspoon honey
5 drops mastic oil
5 drops lavender essential oil (for relaxation) or rosemary essential oil (for invigoration)

Warm the milk in a saucepan and stir in the honey to dissolve. Remove from heat and add the mastic oil and the essential oil of your choice. Fill your bathtub with warm water, pour in the milk mixture and lie in the bath for at least 20 minutes. Used regularly (at least twice a week), this milk bath will keep your skin soft and well moisturized all year-round.
Chios Mastiha Oil Deodorant

30 ml witch hazel extract
30 ml aloe vera gel
30 ml mineral water
1 teaspoon vegetable glycerine
10 drops mastic oil
10 drops bergamot essential oil
5 drops sage essential oil

Combine all ingredients stirring thoroughly and transfer deodorant into a bottle with a spray nozzle attachment. Shake very well before each use. If you will be exposed to the sun, replace bergamot with thyme essential oil, as the former increases the risk of sunburn.
Chios Mastiha Oil Foot Deodorant

30 ml witch hazel extract
4 drops mastic oil
4 drops neroli essential oil

Combine all ingredients stirring thoroughly and transfer deodorant into a bottle with a spray nozzle attachment. Use on clean, dry feet, shaking very well before each use.
Chios Mastiha Oil After Shave Gel

50 ml aloe vera gel
1 tablespoon orange flower water
1 teaspoon witch hazel extract
5 drops mastic oil
5 drops sandalwood essential oil

Put all ingredients into a bottle and shake until well blended. Keep in the fridge and remember to shake well before each use. This after-shave gel will prevent irritations and nourish your skin. It is suitable for all skin types.
Choose the carrier oil most suitable for your needs (i.e.: avocado oil for ageing skin, sweet almond oil for normal skins, or grape seed oil for quick absorbance). For every 100 ml of your selected base oil, add 40 drops mastic oil. Give your loved one a slow, pleasurable, stimulating massage, or apply after bathing or showering to take care of your body and enhance your mood.
Credits

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THE CHIOS MASTIHA GROWERS ASSOCIATION T.: +30 22710 21001-2-3 info@gummastic.gr