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Olive leaves get a guernsey in cancer battle

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Australian scientists say olive leaf extract could be a new cancer killer, after finding in laboratory tests that it can destroy human breast and prostate cancer cells.

Researchers from Southern Cross University in Lismore in northern New South Wales said the antioxidant-rich oil from olive tree leaves had proven lethal to cancer cells in early testing.

They said the findings were interesting but needed to be confirmed in more laboratory work and then clinical trials.

Olive leaves have already been hailed as a natural tonic for ailments such as the common cold, arthritis, eczema and asthma. While olive oil is considered to be good for the heart, the leaves of the plant have 10 times more antioxidants than the fruit.

The latest study was carried out by the Australian Centre for Complemen-

tary Medicine Education and Research, a joint venture between the Lismore university and the University of Queensland.

Principal researcher Lesley Stevenson, from the Southern Cross natural products pharmacology unit, said the study also found that olive leaf extract could help fight some inflammatory conditions.

The latest research followed an earlier study by the university which found that olive tree leaves had five times the antioxidant capacity of vitamin C and almost double that of green tea or grape seed extract.

"The broad-ranging pharmacological activity associated with the tested olive leaf extracts shown in this laboratory study, and the previous measured antioxidant capacity, suggest the extract could have future potential as an intervention in disease processes that involve inflammation such as arthritis," Dr Stevenson said.