



OLIVE TREE CARE

Olive trees are easy to grow. Making olives or olive oil requires dedication and equipment. Some gardeners will prefer the fruitless variety.

Planting

There are many factors to consider when selecting the planting location. Olives thrive in hot, dry summers, but also grow in coastal regions. Olives grow well in well drained soil where winter temperatures do not drop below 22°-25°F (green fruit will be damaged at 32°F). Conversely, average winter temperatures above 50°F will inhibit fruiting. Hot dry winds can damage flowers and cause immature fruit to drop. Plant in full sun and away from paved areas to avoid stains from fallen ripe fruit. Pollinator trees will increase yields, so for serious harvest, plant more than one variety.

Watering

In California, monthly deep watering of trees is adequate, once trees are established. Because of the small tough leaves and slow transpiration rate of olive trees, they survive extended dry periods.

Pruning

Many olive varieties will naturally reach 30 feet in height. Exceptions are Arbequina and Kalamata, which remain smaller. Avoid pruning during the rainy season. Olive trees will tolerate radical pruning, so it is relatively easy to keep them at the desired height. Pruning regulates fruit production and shapes the tree for easier harvest. Fruit is generally borne on the previous year's growth. Many farmers are now using a trellis system for commercial plantings.

Fertilizing

Fertilizing with nitrogen from commercial or organic sources is beneficial for fruit production. Farmers apply fertilizer long before flowers form so trees adsorb the nitrogen before fruit set.

Pest Control

Olive trees have fewer pests than other fruit trees. Biological control with natural enemies is preferred over conventional pesticides, because olive oil will adsorb the odor of chemicals.

Harvest

Olive fruit can be harvested green or later for processing for table olives. Oil can be squeezed from freshly picked crushed fruit. Both of these endeavors require equipment, time and a sizeable volume of fruit.

OLIVE VARIETIES

Arbequina: from Spain, a tree of medium vigor with a weeping shape. It adapts well to dense planting because of its small size. Elliptical leaves are shiny dark green in color. Produces good quality oil. A popular variety for gourmet cooking, also suitable for making table olives.

Frantoio: Translated from Italian as "Olive Mill," this classic Tuscan variety produces a sharply flavorful oil. Self fertile. Can be cured for table olives.

Leccino: Somewhat milder than Frantoio, this olive oil is rich and buttery with distinctive but delicate olive flavor. A good early producer and pollinator. Can be cured for table olives as well.

Maurino: A medium-sized, typically Tuscan oil variety. It is of medium vigor with a pendulous habit, while the fruiting branches are delicate with rising tips. Needs a pollinator such as Pendolino, Leccino or Frantoio.

Pendolino: Primarily used as a pollinator (approximately 10% required per orchard), These olives produce oil of good quality and quantity for blending. Also make small but delicious table olives.

Picholine: A dual purpose olive (oil & table) from the south of France with good cold resistance.

Kalamata: Vigorous tree with an erect habit and canopy of medium density. Elongated fruit has an asymmetric shape that is quite distinctive. While it makes excellent oil, it is chiefly grown for Greek-style brined olives. This variety is resistant to cold but sensitive to excessively hot climates.

Manzanillo: Originated in Spain, Easy pit removal & excellent flesh quality. Vigorous tree. Used for table fruit. Also popular in landscapes.

Picked very early (Sept) when they are green. Very productive. Pollinated by Arbequina and Pendolino.

Coratina: Adaptable Italian olive, makes a peppery oil. Good choice for hot climates, a good pollinator like Frantoio and Leccino.

Hills of Santa Cruz: Fruitless ornamental olive, excellent for landscape use. Medium-sized spreading tree, easily trained as an attractive multi-trunked specimen.