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Olives Fact Sheet and Guide



Olive History

The history of the olive tree can be traced back to Biblical times; when it was grown in the Mediterranean area which continues today. Everyone is familiar with the story of the dove sent out by Noah which returned with an olive branch. The olive was also important to the Greeks and the Romans, who made it a part of their mythologies to celebrate the use of its oil as an essential food and fuel for lamps.

The olive was spread from its place of origin on what is today Turkey and Syria to other parts of the Mediterranean basin in a very early period. The olive found conditions for its greatest cultivation in Italy and

Spain. It was the Spanish who spread the olive to America. Catholic missionaries spread the olive to Mexico and later to California, as well as to South America.

Varieties and Uses

Arbequina - Small fruit. Considered cold resistant. Early cropping variety. High oil content. Spanish variety.

Azapa - Large table fruit. Suits warm to moderate climates. Good bearer.

Barnea - Medium to high oil content. Potential for heavy, early cropping. Can be pickled. Originating in Israel.

Barouni - Large table fruit. For warm to cold areas, good bearer. Mid/late season.

Correggiola - Small/Medium fruit. High oil content. Heavy crops. Ripens late. Tuscan variety.

Frantoio - Small/Medium fruit. High oil content. Heavy cropper. Ripens mid/late season. Origins in Tuscany, Italy. Often pickled with a nutty flavour.

Hardy's Mammoth - Large, dual purpose. Mainly pickled. Ripens early. Prefers cold areas.

Jumbo Kalamata (Grafted Tree) - Excellent very large table fruit with a small seed. Not a true Kalamata.

Kalamata (Grafted Tree) - Dual purpose. Greek table variety. Medium crops. Excellent pickled fruit. Medium oil content of good quality.

Koroneiki - Small fruit. Very good oil. High oil yields. Greek origin.

Leccino - Small-medium sized fruit. Considered dual purpose. Medium to high oil content. Early cropper. Cold resistant.

Manzanillo - Medium/Large fruit. Dual purpose. High quality oil and excellent pickling fruit. Heavy cropper. Ripens early. Spanish origin.



Nabremri - Large table fruit. Good flesh to pit ratio. Regular moderate to heavy crops.

Nevadillo Blanco - Medium sized fruit. Dual purpose. High oil content. Heavy crops. Ripens early to mid season. Spanish variety.

Picholine - An important French, dual purpose variety. High quality oil, medium to high yield. Oval fruit, similar in size to Kalamata. Best pickled green. Ripens mid-late season. Cold tolerant.

Picual - Small-medium sized fruit. High level of quality oil. Cool to warm areas. Spanish origin. Sevillano (Grafted Tree) - Large sized pickling fruit. Medium crops. Quite good flesh to pit ratio. Very cold resistant.

South Australian Verdale - Medium/Large oval shaped fruit. Dual purpose. Low/Medium oil content, but high quality oil. Good cropper.

UC13A6 - Very large table fruit. Heavy regular crops. Ripens early/mid season. Pickled green.

Volos (Grafted Tree) - Large dual purpose fruit. Oil content believed to be very high. Pickled black. Very cold resistant variety. Greek origin.

Climate

The olive tree is generally grown in the 30 to 45 degree latitudes, in both the northern and southern hemispheres. It is best suited to a Mediterranean-type climate of long, hot and dry summers and mild to cool winters. Some olive varieties, such as those grown in Egypt, Tunisia or Israel, bloom and fruit with very little winter chilling, whilst other varieties require more chilling for a normal flower differentiation.

Being an evergreen tree, the olives are sensitive to hard freezing temperatures. Buds and fruiting shoots are usually damaged by temperatures below -5°C. Large branches and whole trees can be killed if temperatures fall below -10°C.

Varieties such as Leccino, Picual, Pendolino, Arbequina, Picholine or Hojiblanca have proven in the Mediterranean area to be more tolerant to cold temperatures than other varieties. Varieties such as Frantoio, Manzanillo or Barnea are considered to be moderate to highly sensitive to frost damage.

Areas where summer rainfall is common may lead to some cultural problems. Fungal and bacterial diseases, as well as difficulties to control fruit moisture levels for oil production, may reduce the trees productivity or oil extraction efficiency.

Pollination

Most olive varieties are self-fertile, but increased production often results from cross pollination.

Soils

The olive has a wide adaptability with regard to soils; it will tolerate a variety from sands to clays with a pH of 5.5 to 8.5. Olive trees have shallow root systems so they do not need a deep soil, but the soils must be well-drained.

Water

The olive is drought tolerant, but grows best when it has sufficient water. Overwatering should be avoided. Choose a sunny, well-drained site with a fertile soil to plant the olive. Water regularly, but do not allow waterlogging to take place.



Pruning

Pruning should be delayed until early spring. Because the tree does not go dormant, any increase in temperature after pruning will stimulate growth which might be damaged by freezing temperatures. The olive is pruned by thinning out dead or otherwise unproductive wood. It should not be topped. An exception to this rule is the use of the olive as a hedge. It will form a dense, attractive hedge if topped and trimmed.

Topping causes the formation of numerous lateral branches and suckers so that a bush is produced. Again, all cutting should be delaying until spring or summer.