



Frequently Asked Questions

By Sandra Winokur

What is the difference between green olives and black olives?

Olives are green when they are unripe, mottled reddish-purple (rosy) when they are partially ripe, and black when they are fully ripe. Pickled green olives and rosy olives are firmer than black olives, and most people find them to have a sharper more pungent flavor. Pickled black olives have a softer texture and a fuller, more subtle flavor. Preference for either is a matter of individual taste.

Olive oil is pressed from a blend of unripe, partially ripe, and fully ripe olives. For a sweeter-flavored oil, the mix is 1/4 green, 1/2 partially ripe, and 1/4 black. If you prefer a sharper-flavored oil, you would use more green olives than either fully ripe or partially ripe in the mix.

How cold-hardy are olive trees?

An olive tree isn't fazed by 32°F. A few varieties of olive trees are extremely cold hardy and can withstand temperatures as low as 10°F. However, most varieties suffer damage when the temperature drops below 20°F and remains at that level for a period of days. Usually, the most likely damage your trees will suffer at that temperature range is tip burning, and they will recover. However, an olive tree is not likely to survive below 10°.

You can spray your trees with water when the temperature is predicted to fall below freezing. The ice that forms on the leaves and branches insulates the tree by holding the temperature to 32°. Additionally, a good watering before a hard freeze helps the root system retain heat.

What soils will olives grow in?

The olive tree is a tremendously adaptable plant that can grow in almost any soil that is well-drained. An extremely pH tolerant plant, olive trees grow successfully in pH ranges from 5.0 (acid level) to 8.5 (alkaline level). Since the trees don't require a lot of organic matter in the soil, they even grow successfully in sand and gravel. In some desert areas, it may be necessary to set the trees in holes drilled through the impermeable layer. Also, a soil that is underlain by a shallow hardpan or a layer of clay could create drainage issues for the trees if water becomes trapped in pockets due to poor absorption, thus drowning the deeper roots.

How soon will my trees produce olives?

The length of time it takes for an olive tree to produce fruit depends on the variety of tree. Dwarf varieties (Arbequina, Arbosana, Koroneiki) have been bred to produce as early as two to three years after planting; others may not produce a full crop until they've been in the ground for four to seven years.

Weather is one factor that determines production. Olive trees need 200-300 chill hours to produce fruit. Once the olive tree has flowered, a temperature of 90° to 100° F and above, can burn the flowers. This will limit your level of production. However, if you already have fruit on the tree, the higher temperatures will not affect the fruit. The USDA is experimenting with products such as *Surround* and comparable products. Spraying the trees with *Surround* or a like product right before they are ready to bud insulates the tree against extreme heat.

Water conditions also affect production. After flowering, the trees need adequate water; however, before budding, you can stress the trees by reducing the water slightly. A little stress will promote fruiting.

Missing nutrients in the soil can affect the amount of fruit and the shape of the fruit your trees produce. For example, if you don't have adequate boron in your soil, your fruit will be misshaped. Also, olive trees require adequate levels of potassium and phosphorus for fruiting. There are other macronutrients and micronutrients that can affect whether your crop will be heavy or light, or whether your trees will produce any fruit at all. For a more thorough explanation of adequate nutrient levels, consult *The Olive Production Manual*.

How much water do olive trees require?

Olive trees are extremely drought-tolerant. Actually, more trees suffer damage due to over-watering than to drought. It is difficult to state a general rule for the amount of water your trees will require, since the amount varies according to the water-holding capacity of the soil in which they are planted. The suggested range is 24 to 52 gallons a week, with sandy soil (sugar sand) requiring the most water, and sandy loam requiring the least. For more detailed information on this topic, please [click here](#).

What is Extra Virgin Olive Oil?

It is all about the acidity level. Olive oil that is .08% or less is classified as extra virgin olive oil. If the oil has an acidity level over .08%, but less than 3%, it is classified as virgin olive oil. Any oil with an acidity level over 3% is simply olive oil.

What is Cold Pressed Olive Oil?

When you press olive oil, a paste, pomace, is formed. Once the olive oil has been extracted from the paste, it can be reheated and run through the machine again. The oil resulting from the reheated pomace, it is not considered cold press and is of an inferior quality.

What is first pressed olive oil?

This means that the oil results from pomace that is fresh rather than used a second time to make oil.

What is the best variety to grow in Texas?

So far we've found fifteen varieties of olive trees that are suited to Texas. These are listed in our nursery section of our website. Some do better in USDA Zone 8 and some do better in Zones 9 and 10. We'll continue to experiment, trying new varieties and growing acclimated stocks of those varieties we've proven suitable.

Does Sandy Oaks Olive Orchard offer consulting services?

We do offer consulting services at the rate of \$125.00 per hour. This is an opportunity for individuals to meet with the owner one on one and is especially suited to those individuals who want to grow olive trees commercially. This consultation is the nuts and bolts of entering this new Texas industry.

In addition, we also routinely offer a free tour on Saturdays at 11:00. During the tour we discuss the care and planting of olive trees as well as their commercial value. We answer our customers' questions on such matters as testing and amending their soils, fertilizing, and selecting appropriate varieties of olive trees.

We're happy to share our experience with our customers who run into problems with their trees. Give us a call (210-621-0044) or email us (saundra@sandyoaks.com) to outline your problems.