



## How to Harvest Olives

By Sandra Winokur

Olive trees are pollinated by wind and not by bees. Some varieties are self fertile, others need another variety or two of the same variety for pollination. Inflorescences appear on olive trees in February and March in Texas. Within a few weeks, the inflorescences become tiny white to green flowers. The flowers drop about 76 hours after they appear, leaving tiny olives, which grow over the spring and summer. In some areas of Texas, olives are ready for harvest in late August. The Texas season for harvesting olives is from late August thru late October.

All olives start out green, then turn to a rosy color and finally are black in color when they are fully ripe. The exact time you choose to harvest your olives depends on whether you want the majority of your olives to be green, rosy, or black. The point of maturity at which you pick your olives determines not only the taste of the olives you intend to pickle, but also the taste of the oil produced from those you intend to press. An oil that is pressed with  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the olives green,  $\frac{1}{4}$ th rosy and  $\frac{1}{4}$ th black will have more of an after flavor that is sharp. If the oil is pressed with a mixture of  $\frac{1}{4}$ th green olives,  $\frac{1}{2}$  rosy olives and  $\frac{1}{4}$ th black olives, the oil will have a milder after flavor. Keep in mind that olives must be brined or pressed into oil within three days from the time they are picked. If you



hold them any longer than that, the olives oxidize and the resulting product is inferior in quality. See the following link, [How to Brine Olives](#), for how to pickle your olives.

As we discussed earlier, you can harvest by hand or by machine. Shakers mounted behind tractors can be used for orchards that are planted either in a high-density or traditional configuration. Grape harvesters can be used for super high-density orchards.

Take care not to bruise the olives when you pick them, and discard any damaged olives. Pick all of the olives off your trees, and never leave olives on the ground to rot. Rotten olives are hosts for the olive fruit fly. This insect has ruined many crops

in California. So far, the olive fruit fly has not appeared in Texas.

We are finding at our orchard, that it takes about 80 to 100 pounds of olives, depending on their ripeness, to make 1 gallon of olive oil.

Sandy Oaks Olive Orchard buys freshly harvested olives at fair market value.

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