



Olives: From Garden to Table

By Sue Mosbacher, UCCE Central Sierra

Olive trees are native to the Mediterranean, grown in rocky soil without irrigation. Rocky soil without irrigation? Sounds like a perfect fit for the Central Sierra region! They are good drought tolerant landscape trees for California and over the last few years many homeowners in the Central Sierra area planted mini olive tree groves.

Planting olive trees comes with a major responsibility, even if used as part of a landscape. They can be messy and if you allow the fruit to rot on the ground you can get an infestation of olive fruit fly. Your fruit flies can travel to commercial olive groves, impacting their crop. To control the fruit fly, use traps and pick up fallen fruit. Learn more about controlling the olive fruit fly at <http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn74112.html>.

If you want to harvest olives for home use, they fruit best with deep monthly irrigation. Be sure to plant them in well-draining soil; they do not like to sit in wet soil in the winter. Olive trees need long summers, heat and full sun. Pay attention to winter temperatures; below 10 degrees will kill them, below 17 degrees will damage them and below 28 degrees will damage the fruit. Sunset Western Garden Book puts them in zone 9, which in our area is closer to El Dorado Hills than Placerville, but they grow in the Placerville area (Sunset zone 7) with the preventative care used to grow citrus. Cold-hardy varieties include Ascalano, Mission, Arbequina and Picual.

Fall is the season to harvest olives, but olives aren't a fruit you pop into your mouth right away. When I was a child my family lived in Michigan for a few years. We visited relatives in Winters one fall and my father picked fresh olives to play a joke on friends back home. He offered California olives, fresh from the tree -- what a treat! His friends weren't sure how to react when they tried to eat one; fresh olives are incredibly bitter. They didn't know if they should be polite

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and eat this gift or spit it out. My dad would laugh and explain that olives must be cured to make them edible. Curing methods to leach out the bitter *oleuropein* compound include using dry salt, brine, water or lye.

If you want to harvest and cure the fruit for eating, different varieties are preferred for different curing methods. Manzanillo works well for a lye-cure; Mission is preferred for a dry salt cure; Kalamata is ideal for Kalamata-style water-cured olives; and Sevillano is best for Sicilian-style lye-fermented olives. UC ANR has a great free publication (#8267) on processing olives at their online catalog at <http://anrcatalog.ucanr.edu>.

To learn more about how to grow, harvest, cure and store olives, join the UCCE Master Gardener and Master Food Preserver volunteers from 9-noon on Saturday, October 24 at the Bethell-Delfino Agriculture Building, 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. The class is free and no reservations are required. UCCE Master Gardeners Debbie Hillel and Dave Hale will explain how to successfully grow olive trees. UCCE Master Food Preservers Benita Moore, Betty Hess-Pierce, and Sue Hale will demonstrate multiple curing methods.

Visit the Sherwood Demonstration Garden Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. during the month of October; the garden is located at 6699 Campus Drive in Placerville, behind Folsom Lake College.

UCCE Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling (530) 621-5512. Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County website at <http://ucanr.edu/edmg>. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at <http://ucanr.edu/mgenews>.

UCCE Master Food Preservers are available to answer home food preservation questions; leave a message on our hotline at (530) 621-5506 or email us at edmfp@ucanr.edu. For more information about the public education classes and activities, go to our website at <http://ucanr.edu/edmfp>. Sign up to receive our online notices at <http://ucanr.org/mfpenews/>. Both groups are also active on Facebook.