

Olives No Longer a Good Landscape Tree By Maxwell Norton

California farmers and home owners continue to suffer the consequences of exotic pests being brought into the state. These new pests cause significant damage to crops and landscape plants. Since they have no natural predators or parasites here in California additional pesticides must be sprayed to control them. One of the latest pests to invade California is the olive fruit fly. A cousin to the walnut husk fly and Mediterranean fruit fly, the olive fruit fly can have multiple generations per year. First captured in Los Angeles, it has quickly spread to orchards and landscapes all over the state.

The olive fruit fly is considered the most devastating insect pest of olives in the Mediterranean region. The larvae (maggots) of the fly infest the fruit, destroying the pulp or edible portion and rendering it useless. Secondary bacteria and fungi then invade the fruit and cause it to have a bad taste, rendering it unsuitable even for olive oil. Rotting fruit on the ground creates a mess and serves as a source for more fruit flies to invade neighboring trees.

The adult fly is only about 6 mm or ¼ inch long. The adult holds its wings out horizontally and the head, thorax and abdomen are brown. The thorax will have darker markings and several white or yellow patches on the top and sides. Most people will not notice the adult's presence. Homeowners first become aware of the problem when the rotting fruit falls from the tree or they check olives they have preserved and find tiny dead maggots in the flesh.

Commercial growers must spray an insecticidal bait several times per year to suppress the populations. This may have to occur as often as every two weeks. Specific recommendations for commercial growers can be found at www.ucipm.ucdavis.edu and selecting **agriculture and floriculture > olives**.

For landscape or home orchard trees the best approach is to eliminate all the fruit with two hormone sprays at bloom time. There are a couple of brands available – often referred to as “nuisance fruit eliminator.” Follow the label instructions carefully. You will need to continue treating as long as there are blossoms on the tree. Any fruit that falls on the ground must be cleaned up promptly to prevent it from being a source of new flies. An informational publication titled: Olive Fruit Fly – Pest Notes #74112 for landscapes can be found at www.ucipm.ucdavis.edu and selecting **landscapes, gardens and turf > olive fruit fly**. Both publications are available for a small charge at your local Cooperative Extension office.

Since the olive is ranked with the fruitless mulberry as one of the worst landscape trees for causing allergies, the fruit fly problem makes it a very poor choice for landscape use. Unless the tree has sentimental value, homeowners should consider removing olive trees if they do not think they can reliably eliminate the flowers with the hormone sprays each spring and keep nuisance fruit from accumulating. Untreated trees will serve as a source of fruit flies for other trees in the neighborhood. There are some fruitless varieties now

available from your local full-service nursery or garden center. They are Majestic Beauty, Swan Hill, Wisoni and Little Ollie (a dwarf).