

# JUST FRUITS

## AND EXOTICS

## OLIVES

### INTRODUCTION

We were really excited when we found out it was possible to grow Olive trees in the South. After many trials with several varieties, we found that the Arbequina was the only consistent fruiter for us and it's self-fertile! These impressive, long-lived trees require two things to be happy: temperatures above 10°F in the winter and 300 hours of chill to bear fruit. The trees are gorgeous evergreens with misty gray foliage. They are fast growers and will bear in 3 to 4 years. The fruit is picked green and pickled for green olives, or allowed to ripen to black for crushing into olive oil or making salted black olives.

### USES IN THE LANDSCAPE

Olive trees have a classic Mediterranean look - gray and willowy. One of the most adaptable of trees, Olives can be planted out to grow into large shade trees, trained to espalier or grown in containers. You can use Olive trees to create an Italian garden, with rosemary, oregano and other Mediterranean herbs. Plant salt-tolerant Olives near the seashore, surrounded by lantanas and plumbago. Train an elegant weeping Olive against a sunny wall. Use Olives, trained as standards, in large containers for a formal look around a pool or on a patio.

### PLANTING + CULTURE

#### SITE SELECTION

Olives will grow in a wide range of soils, as long as good drainage is provided. Avoid heavy clay soils. Olives are among the most tolerant of high soil salinity of all fruit trees. Pick a sunny, well-drained spot.

### PLANTING + CULTURE

#### SOIL PREPARATION + PLANTING

Dig a planting hole approximately three times the width of the pot and at the same depth as the root ball. Set that soil aside and mix it 50/50 with either aged mushroom compost, aged manure, or rotted pine bark & aged manure/compost. Remove the plant from the pot, gently loosen the root ball and place in the planting hole. To avoid burying too deep, make sure plant is positioned with the top most roots at the soil line. Fill the planting hole with the mix of soil and organic matter; gently tamp it in. Water thoroughly to settle the roots and eliminate air pockets. Do NOT put in the planting hole. Only apply fertilizer if it is the correct time of year (see Fertilization section below). If desired, construct a water basin around the base of the tree approximately 36 inches in diameter. Mulch in spring and summer with approximately 4-6 inches of mulch. Pull mulch a couple of inches away from the trunk for good air circulation. Spacing of trees is dependent upon how you wish to prune them (more on that later). Trees that will be grown to full size should be planted 30 feet apart in Zone 9 and 20 feet apart in Zone 8b.

### FRUIT PRODUCTION

Arbequina olive trees are self-pollinating. This means that a single tree will set fruit. While bee activity is not required for fruit set, there is evidence that fruit set is greater if bees have visited the olive flowers. Olives tend to bear heavily in alternate years. You can help insure good crops every year by having a bee-friendly habitat, preventing over-bearing, and fertilizing properly. Mature olive trees rarely require thinning, but juvenile trees sometimes set more fruit than they can support, a condition called over-bearing. Over-bearing can lead to reduced fruit size and quality, possible limb damage, and reduced vigor and fruit set the following year. For the largest possible olives, and stronger trees, thin to 2 or 3 fruit per foot of twig as soon as possible after fruit set. Established trees will survive and fruit with considerable neglect, but, like all fruits, reward the attentive gardener with better fruit and more bountiful harvests.

## FERTILIZATION

The type of fertilizer you choose may be chemical or organic. Make sure that the fertilizer contains iron, zinc, manganese, magnesium, molybdenum, copper and boron. These minor elements are very important to plants and most soils are low in these elements. Application rates vary according to age of plant. See chart below:

Starter Fertilizer & Soil (Apply at Planting)	Fertilizer to Maintain (Apply Early March, Late May, & Late July)
Espoma Bio-tone® Starter Plus Mix Mushroom Compost in Soil	Espoma Tree-tone®

Notes:

- Follow Instructions on Bag for how much to apply each time.
- Months to Fertilize vary based on your zone. Fertilize 3 times per year. We recommend the 1<sup>st</sup> fertilization starting after the last Freeze of the winter (Late February/Early March in zone 8) & the last Fertilization being no later than August or even June/July in some of the colder zones 7 & below.)
- Fertilizing too late in the year in colder climates will promote new growth, which will be subject to freeze damage.

See our “Planting a Tree Correctly” Guide & Espoma Bio-tone® and Tree-tone® Fact Sheets on our website for more info.

## WATER

Olives are very drought tolerant once established. The first year is a critical time for the establishment of a new olive. Water thoroughly twice a week on light soils and once a week on clay soils. Soak the entire root system deeply – this usually takes 40-50 minutes. Olives should receive at least 1 inch of water each week for best growth and fruit production. Water regularly, especially during dry periods. Fruit may drop prematurely if insufficiently irrigated during dry spells.

## PESTS + DISEASES

Olive scale and peacock leaf spot can damage olive crops. However, in 20 years of growing olives, we’ve never had problems. Be sure to provide excellent drainage, ample sun, and avoid over watering.

## PRUNING + SHAPING

Olive trees can be grown in the orchard, in containers and as espalier. Espalier trees should be trained to the desired shape. Leave wood from the previous season’s growth for successful fruit production. For trees grown in containers or in the orchard, 3 branches are selected to serve as scaffold branches in the first year. For the next 3 to 4 years, remove suckers and water sprouts as well as any damaged or crossing branches. During this growth and establishment stage, pruning should be kept to the minimum. A secondary scaffold system of 3 branches may be developed from the main scaffold branches. Olive fruits are borne on the previous year’s growth. Most fruit is carried in a shell 2 to 3 feet deep around the outer edge of the tree. Pruning of an established tree should be done to promote a continuous supply of new fruiting wood and to keep the bearing zone vigorous. Excessive pruning will reduce fruit crops and increase vegetative growth. Olives require good light for fruiting and should not be spaced too closely together, or planted in shade. If trees are damaged by frost, wait until the next June or July to prune to avoid removing limbs that may survive and fruit. Remove damaged or dead branches. Young trees (1-2 year old) are more vulnerable to frost than are older trees. If temperatures are expected to drop into the mid-20°F, wrap the trunks of young trees with insulation for protection.

## HARVEST + STORAGE

Harvesting depends upon how you wish to process the olives. Green olives should be picked when some of the fruit have a purple-black tinge to them. Black olives are picked when fully darkened. The easiest way to pick olives is to place a tarpaulin under the tree and either hand pick or use a rake with widely spaced teeth. In the Mediterranean, trees are hit with a long pole to harvest the fruit and thin the tree slightly. All olives must be processed before eating. Raw olives are very astringent!

## VARIETIES

A detailed Variety List can be found on our website: [justfruitsandexotics.com](http://justfruitsandexotics.com)