

## About Olives

Firstly, it should be said that there are many different cultivated varieties of olives and most are very hardy although some need protection. The olives sold in Kings Park Nursery are standard *Olea europaea*. They are one of the hardiest varieties that can survive in the UK.

Although not traditionally regarded as a hardy tree in Britain, olives are known to be growing outdoors successfully in various parts of the country, north and south. In fact, the oldest olive tree in Britain is now over 100 years old and fruits in decent summers. *Olea europaea* 'Peace' is a very large-leaved form and is particularly vigorous, which has a lot to do with its success in growing outdoors in various parts of Britain. Its large foliage enables the plant to photosynthesize efficiently and therefore it grows quickly upwards as well as putting its roots down and away from the frost zone at a young age. It also means that the stems fatten up rapidly so it can become strong enough to withstand cold winter winds at a young age.

## Planting

The best chances of success will be by planting your new tree directly in the garden in the spring to summer or planting into a much larger pot in good compost. All evergreen plants in outdoor containers can struggle in severe freezing weather, including some very hardy plants like rhododendrons. If the pot becomes frozen day and night and a breeze is blowing, the plant will continue to lose water through its foliage which cannot be replaced as the water in the pot is frozen solid. Consequently, it will start to use up all the spare moisture in its leaves to survive. Once all that is gone, the leaves are sacrificed as a last desperate act of survival. Container-grown olives will behave in the same way and the pot they are growing in should be kept wrapped in severe weather (usually December to February) for the benefit of keeping the exposed roots from freezing. If you have a very tender variety of olive, it must be protected indoors or in a frost-free greenhouse.



When it is finally planted outdoors, choose a sunny place protected from the east and northerly winds. If you have clay soil, you should improve the drainage with plenty of gravel at planting. You can expect flowers in the early summer which will develop fruit, but do not expect the fruit to ripen. Even in hot Mediterranean climates the fruit are not harvested until November or later. In a very hot summer, fruit will develop on trees but unfortunately we need much more sunshine to have a consistent crop of fruit.



# Advice Sheet

## Olive Planting and Care continued

### Fruiting

Olive trees have been gaining popularity in Britain in recent years as we have been having consistently warmer winters and there has been an increased realisation that mature trees are quite tough. However, one of the most asked questions is “When can I expect to pick my own olives?” Trees can fruit quite easily but the fruit will only ripen in a good summer. So, rather than expect a regular crop you are best taking the approach of ‘if it fruits it’s a bonus’. There are mixed reports of olive trees producing fruit in the UK and much depends on your locality, soil, shelter etc. But much more depends on the particular variety you are growing. Unfortunately, due to the high demand for plants in recent years, there has been an influx of various unnamed varieties arriving into the British Isles, mainly from Italy and Spain, some of which seem to produce fruit and others which don’t. In good summers, the fruit have even turned from green to black. Like many other plants, olives seem to produce more flower when grown in a pot, probably as this restricts the roots. But good flowering then has to be followed by a good summer for any chance of fruit ripening.

### Processing the Fruit for Eating

When an olive tree produces ripe fruit, it is not possible to pick it and eat it immediately, as the fruit is far too bitter. They must be cleaned regularly as part of the processing to prepare them for the table. As I understand it, there are various ways of doing this. Basically, having picked the ripe olives, they should be laid in trays of clean water. The water needs to be changed every two or three days until the olives no longer taste bitter. This may take a month or more. Fresh or salty water can be used although the process is quicker when using saline water but the flavour of course will be affected. Finally, the berries can be stored in jars of fresh or salty water and kept in the fridge, or preserved in olive oil which can be flavoured in any number of different preferred ways.

### Making Olive Oil

If you are fortunate in having your trees fruit, then it is far easier to produce your own olive oil than processing the fruit for the table. Simply gather your ripe fruit, crush them and then squeeze the juice through a press. Your oil is now ready for use and will initially appear very green. The colour quickly fades to a more golden yellow but its eventual colour will depend on the variety used. Incidentally, it takes about 4.8kg of olives to produce a litre of olive oil.

### For further help and advice

Please come into the nursery (with pictures if you have them) and we will be happy to advise you further, or ask your question on Facebook.

