



Growing Olives in the Foothills
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So you have planted all the usual fruit trees and even have a few citrus, but now you want to try something a little different. One tree you could consider if you enjoy a challenge is olive.

Olives are native to the Mediterranean and have been cultivated for thousands of years. In the Mediterranean, they are grown in rocky soil without irrigation. In California, commercially, they are grown in the silty soil of the central valley with lots of water. Though they are drought tolerant, they fruit best with deep monthly irrigation. They do not like to sit in wet soil in the winter. Sunset Western Garden Book puts them in zone 9, which in our area is closer to El Dorado Hills than Placerville, but they can be grown in the Placerville area (Sunset zone 7) if you follow the same precautions you would follow to grow citrus. They need long summers, heat and full sun, so plant them against a south or west wall, or at the top of a south or west slope that allows the cold air to drain by them. You can cover them during cold spells if you keep the trees small. They will be damaged by temperatures below 17 degrees and killed by temperatures below 10 degrees. Temperatures below 28 degrees will damage the fruit. There are varieties that are more cold-hardy, including Ascalano, Mission, Arbequina and Picual.

Olives are decorative trees with beautiful soft grey leaves and, with time, their smooth grey trunks grow gnarly and interesting. Because they are slow-growing, they are suitable for pots, though they can reach heights of up to 50 feet. They are a messy tree and if you allow the fruit to rot on the ground you could get an infestation of olive fruit fly. To control the fruit fly, use traps and pick up fallen fruit. There are some 'fruitless' varieties of olive, though even they have some small fruit, or you can spray with a fruit-control hormone spray. Another way to help control fruit production is to not provide a pollinizer.

Some olives are self-fruitful, and some are partially self-fruitful, but most do better when paired with a specific pollinizer. Check out this link to Dave Wilson Nursery for information on pollinizers for certain olive varieties. (<http://www.davewilson.com/product-information/product/olives>).

You can prune olives during the summer to eliminate suckers and water sprouts, or in the spring while in blossom. Do not prune in the winter when freezing is a risk.

If you are growing the trees for their fruit, an application of nitrogen before flowering in the spring will be beneficial.

The olive harvest occurs in the fall. The fruit is inedible without being processed to eliminate their bitterness, using dry salt or brine, water, or lye. If you are interested in processing and preserving olives, the local UCCE Master Food Preservers are offering a class on processing olives on October 18th

(http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.edu/Master_Food_Preservers/Classes/?calitem=231313&g=40542).

Processing the fruit for oil is not practical for the home gardener due to the cost of oil presses. Good luck trying your gardening hand on these beautiful trees!

There is no Master Gardener class this Saturday, September 20th, 2014. UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County are available to answer home gardening questions at local Farmers Markets, and from Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to noon, at their office located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. Walk-ins are welcome at the office, or call ([530](tel:5306215512)) 621-5512.

Master Gardeners are seeking your opinion on where, when, and what subjects should be taught at their free public education gardening classes. Help them understand how to best serve our community by filling out a brief online survey at <http://bit.ly/1qCsRIId>. Paper copies of the survey are also available at the Master Gardener office.

For more information about our free public education classes and activities, go to our Master Gardener website at http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.org/Master_Gardeners/. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at <http://ucanr.edu/mgenews/>. You can also find us on Facebook.