

Olives

While the olive has been around as a food source for thousands of years, it has only been since the early 1990's that we've tried growing them in Texas. The Texas Olive Oil Council reports about a dozen growers in Texas. They have determined South Texas as the most promising growing location, and Austin is right on the edge of this area. The olive trees we are selling are purported to withstand temperatures of 20 F°. Temperatures in the teens will likely cause tip damage, but temperatures falling to single digits could kill a tree outright. As olive trees mature, they become more cold-hardy. To be on the safe side during freezing weather, wrap the lower two to three feet of the trunk with piping insulation or similar material, protecting the tree's core. Maintain at least a three-inch layer of mulch over the root zone, and water the olive tree thoroughly before a freeze. Avoid putting mulch up on the trunk. If tip damage occurs, prune damaged parts after the last frost. Also, to avoid promoting tender new growth before winter, do not prune after mid-September.

The growing requirements for the olive tree are minimal. Olives require excellent drainage – heavy clay or poorly draining soils will not work. They need full sun. Consult our handout *Planting & Maintenance Guide for Fruits, Nuts, & Berries* for further instructions. Most olive trees take 4 – 5 years to begin producing.

Olive Varieties for Central Texas – Size and description of tree; Productivity; Frost tolerance; Use of fruit; Size, shape, & color of fruit at ripening; Oil quality & flavor; Growing conditions; Amount of time for tree to bear; Time of year that fruit matures; Other information.

Spanish Varieties

Arbequina – Tree of medium vigor with weeping shape grows to 15'; Productive; Frost resistant to 18-19°F; Usually self-fertile & any pollinator increases yield; Used mainly for oil; Small, symmetrical, black fruit; Aromatic, fruity, & sweet oil (yield 20-22%); Adaptable to different climates & soils; Early bearing: in about 2-3 years; Matures mid season but not all at once.

Arbosana – Tree grows to 12-15' with lower vigor which allows for high density planting; Very productive, with tendency toward alternate bearing; Frost resistant to 21-24°F; Used for oil and fruit; small to medium purple-brown fruit; Unique, fruity, strong-flavored oil (yield 19-20%) that is often mixed with milder oils to improve their flavor and increase shelf life; Best in well-drained soil of low fertility; Fairly early bearing: in 5 years; Matures late season; Heirloom variety; Good for containers or in-ground.

Picual – Vigorous tree with a large crown and open shape; Very productive; Medium cold resistance; Some sources say self-fertile; Used mainly for oil; Medium size, elliptical fruit with a pointed tip, dark green to dark black; Strong pungent oil of good quality and very high yield (yield 23-28%); Vigorous and adaptable to a variety of conditions; Early bearing; Early maturing.

United States Variety

Mission – Beautiful, vigorous, erect tree to 20'-35'; Medium productivity and alternate bearing; The most cold hardy olive: to 10° F; Self-fertile, but much better with a pollinator; Used for oil and fruit; Medium-sized, inch-long, green to brown-red fruit; Oil ranges from bitter when fruits are young to smooth and buttery when very ripe (yield 21-22%); Average, well-draining soil; Intermediate bearing; Late maturing fruit; Grown at the old missions in California.

Italian Variety

Pendolino – Slow-growing tree with a weeping shape and dense canopy to 20' or more; Very productive; Medium cold hardiness; Pendolino is the universal pollinator for all other olives, but is self-sterile (it needs a pollinator); Used for oil, fruit, and as a pollinator; Dark black, small, asymmetrical fruit with a rounded tip; Delicate, good quality oil (yield 22-23%); Average, well-draining soil; Early bearing; Matures simultaneously, and intermediate in relation to the other cultivars.