

FARMER IN THE FIELD



CALIFORNIA OLIVES

By Bonnie Swank

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Did you know that California is the only state in the nation producing a commercially significant crop of olives? Although the history of the olive goes back centuries, it was the Spaniards who introduced them to the Americas. In the mid-1500s cuttings were taken to Peru and traveled north to Mexico and California by Franciscan monks. The first trees planted in California were in 1769 at Mission San Diego and spread through the California mission system.

In California 90 percent of olive production goes to canning leaving only 10 percent of the crop for crushing. Personally I think in the past ten years or so olive groves have become like vineyards, popping up everywhere creating a niche market for small growers. Olive oil has become a staple in many kitchens and vary in flavor. Extra virgin olive oil has the lightest flavor, less acidic and comes from the first pressing. I always wondered about the “first press”, how many times could they press an olive? Well, after the first press the leftovers are processed into Pomace and mixed with virgin olive oil making pure olive oil or olive oil. Use these oils for cooking and save your extra virgin olive oil to flavor your food.

California farmers grow several varieties of table olive but most popular varieties are;

Manzanillo; a small green oval shaped olive, firm texture, slightly tangy and often stuffed with pimento or garlic.

Sevillano; large firm green olive, buttery flavor with a tart finish, this is the perfect olive to pit and stuff.

Ascolano; very large green olive, soft texture, slightly salty delicate taste.

Barouni; medium to large round green olive, fruity and slightly bitter taste, a favorite with home canners.

For those of you who are ambitious enough to cure your own olives there are a few different techniques to choose from. Brine and dry (salt) curing are recommended for small black olives and for large black olives dry (salt) curing is recommended. They all take time and attention making oil curing the easiest, cover in olive oil and leave alone for several months ☺