How to pickle your own olives

K.T. Whitely

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Are you one of the increasing number of people who planted olive trees a few years ago, with an eye to a future ample supply of tasty pickled olives? If so, your trees will now be starting to bear useful crops and you will be interested in this article on . . .

how to pickle your own olives

By K. T. WHITELY, Horticultural Adviser

THE increased number of people who now have their own olive trees and also the increased availability of good pickling olives on the local market has produced a rising interest in pickling olives.

However, if you intend planting trees for pickling purposes you will need to know that the varieties Verdale, Verdalian, Cucco, Oblitza and Manzanillo all bear medium sized fruit and Sevilliano large fruit, all suitable for pickling. The variety Mission also pickles well but the olives are inclined to be too small when the variety sets heavily. Many other un-named varieties grown in this State also produce olives which pickle well.

There are many recipes for pickling olives. Those given below are quite simple and should give satisfactory results for most home picklers.

When to Pick for Green Pickling

The type of pickling which appeals most to the average Australian palate is the green pickled olive. Olives for green pickling should be harvested as the deep green colour changes to a lighter, yellower, shade. Some which start to soften excessively at this stage should be picked earlier, others which hold their firmness, such as Manzanillo, can be left until they have a splash of purple on them.

Careful handling is imperative both at harvest and in subsequent handling, as bruising leads to discoloration and rots in the picked fruit. Nevertheless some sorting of the fruit will pay dividends in a more even final product.

The fruit should be carefully graded for size and maturity and any immature, overmature or damaged olives together with leaves, twigs and culled out at this time.

The less delay the better between harvest and treatment, so if you are buying olives for pickling, make sure that they are fresh.

Soak in caustic solution

The thing that distinguishes the preservation of olives from other fruits is that the natural bitter elements in the flesh must be removed. The most convenient way of doing this is by treatment with weak caustic soda solution.

After washing with water the olives are placed in a non-metallic container of suitable size and covered with caustic solution of a strength between 2 to 3 oz. of caustic soda per gallon of water. The lower strength is used for more mature fruit.

A small quantity of common salt (2 to 3 oz. per gallon) will reduce the softening effect of the caustic on the olives.

The olives are kept completely submerged in this caustic or lye solution— as
any exposure to the air will cause darken-
ing—until it has penetrated \( \frac{2}{3} \) to \( \frac{3}{4} \) of the way to the pit. This can be checked by observing the depth of yellowish lye-
treated flesh on a cut olive or by putting a few drops of phenolphthalein indicator solution on the cut section. A pink to red stain shows the lye affected zone.

The penetration can take from eight to 24 hours or even more. If sufficient depth has not been achieved in about 15 hours change the olives to a fresh lye solution.

**Wash to remove caustic**

After sufficient penetration of the lye the olives must be washed in clean water to remove the excess caustic. Washing should proceed as rapidly as possible by changing the water frequently and should have been carried out in 12 to 48 hours. During washing reduce exposure to the air to a minimum. The progress on washing can be checked as for lye penetration with the phenolphthalein indicator which should show no coloration when washing is complete. In practice it is better to leave slight traces of the lye than to wash for an excessive time to the detriment of colour, texture and flavour of the pickled olive.

**Pickling in brine solutions**

After lye treatment and washing, the olives are pickled in a series of brines. Start with 4 oz. of salt per gallon of water for 24 hours; then use 5 oz. of salt per gallon of water for three days; finish with 6 oz. of salt per gallon of water for seven days.

The olives are then rinsed and packed into glass jars which have been filled with boiling brine solution of 8 oz. of salt per gallon and then lidded, and sterilised.

**Sterilising is a problem**

It is recommended that in order to ensure that there is no possibility of development of food poisoning bacteria the sterilising should be done at 240° F. for 60 minutes.

As this temperature is not usually attainable it is necessary to increase the acidity in the final brine by adding one part of good quality vinegar to three parts of brine. This acidity then inhibits the bacterial growth and sterilising is not necessary. The average palate requires such olives to be washed in clean water for 24 hours before use.

As an alternative to using the vinegar the pickling brine strengths can be increased to 1\( \frac{1}{2} \) lb. salt per gallon over a series of, say, six increasing strengths—4 oz., 6 oz., 8 oz., 12 oz., 1 lb. and 1\( \frac{1}{2} \) lb. per gallon.

If it is intended to treat olives in this way the earlier penetration with lye should only be allowed to proceed about half way to the pit. The olives are then washed and then treated with a series of brine solutions such as I have just mentioned.

Suggested times for the various strengths are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Salt</th>
<th>Time (days)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4 oz. per gallon of water</td>
<td>1 day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 oz. per gallon of water</td>
<td>3 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 oz. per gallon of water</td>
<td>1 week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 oz. per gallon of water</td>
<td>1 week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 lb. per gallon of water</td>
<td>1 week</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The olives are then bottled in a brine of 1\( \frac{1}{2} \) lb. salt/gallon which is renewed every month. However, the salinity of these is such that they must be washed in several changes of fresh water for 24 to 48 hours hours before the flavour becomes palatable to most people. The olives must then be used within three days, during which they should be stored in a cool place.

**Black Olives**

If you prefer the Greek “black” or “dry pickle” type of olive rather than the “green pickle” you should harvest the fruit fully ripe. The olives used should remain firm when fully ripe.

Having washed the olives you then pack them in alternate layers with coarse salt.

The salty juices seeping from the stack should be allowed to drain from the containers. The olives-salt layering should be left for two to four months until the desired reduction of bitterness has been achieved.

Excess salt is then washed from the olives and they are either coated with olive oil or even completely covered with the oil.
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