

OLIVE TREE CARE



Growing an olive tree, *Olea europaea*, is extremely rewarding in Northeast Ohio for its peaceful symbolism, attractive foliage, and profuse, sweetly scented blooms. The plant's ability to produce fruit despite a shortened growing season, its resiliency and adaptability to thrive in container gardens, and its tolerance of heat, dry air, and drought make for a fascinating edible tropical and seasonal houseplant.

Flowering, fruiting & foliage - Olive trees develop shiny, silver to deep green foliage that is considered evergreen, constantly renewing leaves. In spring, fragrant clusters of white, self-fertile blossoms develop and require no cross-pollination; however, fruit quality and yield improve when two or more plants are grown together. With 'Arbequina' olives, plants begin to develop fruit around five to six years old. They produce small, green to pink-hued or tan to brown-hued fruit with a sweet, aromatic, and firm taste, ripening late summer to late fall on old wood (2 years old). For best harvests, thin olives to 3-5 fruit per 1 foot of branch. Be aware, fresh olives are intensely bitter and are typically brined/cured before eating.

Light - Olives require 6+ hours of direct sunlight (full sun) to flourish. Indoors, a south or west facing window with bright direct sunlight is best. If the plant is placed in indirect light, it will continue to grow but may not flower/fruit well and the foliage may drop. When it is time to transition the olive from inside to out, do this slowly in mid-May over two weeks, beginning under a shady tree or protected area, then gradually moving the olive out into full sun. Reverse this treatment when bringing it inside for winter.

Temperature - Try to mimic a Mediterranean climate; olives enjoy heat and drier conditions. An ideal temperature range for them to flourish is 60-85° F. They are rated for USDA Cold Hardiness Zones 8-11 (10-50° F) but have the best success growing indoors over winter. In the fall, try to keep the olive tree in cooler temps (40-50° F) for two months to help initiate blooms along with exposing it to one or two light frosts to help slow its growth and make it easier to transition indoors. Providing a 5-10° F reduction of indoor temperatures from day into night can help promote flowering, too.

Watering - Water thoroughly and deeply when the soil feels dry 1-2" deep. Olives growing in containers may need daily watering in the middle of summer, but only once every two weeks, or less, during winter. Average humidity (40%) is good, but higher or lower humidity is tolerated, as well.

Feeding - Olives prefer a balanced, slow-release fertilizer applied April to September. Plant-tone® and Osmocote® (green cap) are both excellent, multi-purpose plant foods. Select and apply one as directed.

Other - *Re-pot* in the spring, every 1-2 years, using a moistened, well-drained potting mix or cactus soil. *Prune* in late winter/early spring, removing central and top growth to promote an open shape and lateral branching. Also remove weak, damaged, or diseased growth at any time. Olives can be sheared into *topiaries*, too. *Stake* when young until their trunk is 1.25" diameter and less flexible. The ASPCA lists olives as *non-toxic* for cats and dogs, but the pits can be choking hazards. *Neem oil* is excellent for controlling disease or insect issues the plant may develop indoors or out. Olives are ancient plants, *very tough*, long-lived, and with proper care, can last many years as an indoor/outdoor tropical houseplant.



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location
information

