October 4, 2017

Olives!
By Sue Hale
UCCE Master Food Preserver of El Dorado County

Last year my husband and I picked olives from a local farm. The owners were not producing olive oil that year, so they opened it up for picking. We were very excited, since we had seen a UCCE Master Food Preserver demonstration the year before and really wanted to try curing olives. We downloaded the guide to process the olives (UC ANR Publication #8267) and made sure we had the necessary supplies, including lots of salt and some lye.

We spent a few hours picking the olives on a beautiful sunny day. I confess, I had to try a fresh one, even though I knew olives are terribly bitter straight from the tree and cannot be eaten that way. Olives contain a very bitter compound called *oleuropein*. They must be cured to remove the bitterness. I can confirm that for you!

At home we sorted the olives by size and color, and after consulting the instructions again, we decided which processes to use. The olives that had started to change color we processed by salt water curing. We started with a heavy salt brine, then later switched to a lighter brine. By fermenting the olives with salt water, the sugars in the fruit were converted to lactic acid. It also broke down the chemical bond between the oleuropein and sugars, and the bitterness was leached into the brine. That whole process took several months before the olives were ready to eat.

It was much quicker to use the lye cure method. We did this with the green-ripe olives. We read and followed the instructions carefully. We put the olives in a lye-water solution for about 12 hours, and then rinsed with fresh water several times a day. This took about a week. Then we stored the olives in a light brine solution until they were ready to eat. This takes about 2 weeks and they were absolutely delicious!

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The olives we picked were planted for olive oil rather than table olives. They were a little smaller, but turned out fantastic; we are very excited to do this again this year.

Only use freshly harvested, unbruised olives for processing at home. Olives have different stages of ripeness: green-ripe, turning color, and naturally black ripe. The olives are probably at the green-ripe stage now. Mature green-ripe olives release a creamy white juice when you squeeze them. Most green-ripe olives are harvested when they are even colored, from yellow-green to a straw color. As the olives continue to ripen they start changing color to a rose, then red-brown. The flesh is still firm and lacks dark pigment. Olives are considered naturally ripe when their color is dark red to purple or black. Their flesh is nearly completely pigmented and they release a reddish black pigment when you squeeze them.

Depending on the stage of ripeness and the variety of olives will help determine what processing method is best. You can get the Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources publication 8267 *Olives: Safe Methods for Home Pickling* from: http://anrcatalog.ucdavis.edu.

Want to learn more about growing, harvesting and curing olives? Come to the free olive class on Wednesday, October 11 from 9am to noon at the Cameron Park Community Center, 2502 Country Club Drive in Cameron Park. UCCE Master Gardeners will explain how to grow olives, Master Food Preservers will demonstrate how to cure them. No reservations are necessary.

UCCE Master Food Preservers are available to answer home food preservation questions; leave a message on our hotline - (530) 621-5506. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to the UCCE Master Food Preservers of El Dorado County website at http://ucanr.edu/edmfp. Sign up to receive our E-Newsletter at http://ucanr.org/mfpenews/. You can also find us on Facebook.