

# OLIVES

## *Olea europaea*

### SCRIPTURES:

- Genesis 8:8-11 Dove returns to the ark with an olive leaf
- Exodus 27:20 Olive oil used for temple lamps
- Hosea 14:6 Green olives eaten with bread
- I Kings 6:23 Cherubim made of olive wood
- Psalms 45:7 Olive oil is a symbol of gladness
- Psalms 23:5 Olive oil used in anointing
- Deut. 8:8 Olives included in prestigious list of seven species

*Note: not one biblical reference refers to eating olives!*

**PLANT DESCRIPTION:** It is an evergreen tree. Flourishes under cultivation and even thrives on rocky hillsides. Black olives are nothing but very ripe green ones. Best productive years are 40-50 years old, but the trees can go on bearing for hundreds of years. The tree blossoms in May and the fate of the flower is a serious concern. “Omer”, the 50-day period between Passover and Pentecost sees searing winds blowing in from the desert. This could ruin the blossoms (Job 15:33). Harvest is normally around end October. Traditionally olives were harvested by beating the branches with sticks (Deut. 24:20). By Jesus’ time a more gentle approach was used – shaking the branches. The plants are often grafted. The oil was acquired by a stone wheel which crushed the fruit. Oil was stored in vats or clay jars.

**PLANT HISTORY:** *Olea europaea* grows in the land of Israel and is a wild strain of olives. Probably it is the first domesticated species in the world. When the Israelites came into the land it was promised they would find olive orchards (Deut. 6:11). It was a significant export from the land of Israel. History reports olive trees flourished in the gardens of the Pharaohs. During the 13<sup>th</sup> century BC King Solomon traded olive oil for cedars from the King of Tyre (I Kings 5:11). Perfumed olive oil was among the treasures which King Hezekiah showed the king of Babylon (2 Kings 20:13). Thousands and thousands of gallons of oil flowed from the presses of Ekron (7<sup>th</sup> century BC identified city 22 miles west of Jerusalem). Excavations have uncovered more than 100 olive press installations there.

**PLANT USES:** In Bible days olive oil had many uses. It was an indispensable fuel. It was a pleasing offering to God in the tabernacle (Ex. 29:40) and later in the temple. It was the anointing oil of kings (I Sam. 10:1) and priests (Ex. 29:7). It was a cosmetic (Eccl. 9:8) and a medicine (Isa. 1:6, Mark 6:13, Luke 10:34). The wood has many uses. Thinner branches were woven into baskets. The thicker portions of wood had beautiful patterns and so were in demand for furniture making and building. The first temple had doors of carved olive wood (I Kings 6:31-35).

**NUTRITION FACTS:** Olives contain fiber, sugars, vitamins A and C, calcium and iron. Medically they are said to prevent heart disease, cancer and heal inflammation.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY:** *Zondervans Pictorial Bible Dictionary; Illustrated Dictionary of Bible Life and Times (Readers Digest); Food at the Time of the Bible (Miriam Feinberg V amosh).*