

Olea - Growing Guide

Growing Olea

Olive

Even if you could find an olive plant or tree still for sale in a garden centre or nursery it would be a very bad idea indeed to purchase it. Olives are being decimated and killed by a disease called Xyella in Italian and Spanish olive growing regions so importation of these plants has been banned Europe wide for the last few years. The days where garden centres were selling huge cut back olive trees in massive containers or where olives were being sold as standard trees are long over. A few people have tried to grow olives commercially in hotter south coast counties but they too will be praying that this horrid disease does not reach the UK. It kills many other plants (eg lavender, oleander) as well so it is vital that we all obey the rules as Xyella would be a disaster in our gardens.

If all that has not put you off ever buying an olive you still can. We source our plants as liners (small rooted cuttings) from a recognised UK grower but sales are limited nowadays. Olives are definitely only for the greenhouse or conservatory in colder areas of the country. Clearly, in time, they will become trees so regular pruning will be needed. However they can go out onto the patio in a large container in the summer and they will produce tiny white flowers in panicles in summer. After a hot summer these may even go on to produce small olives but they are unlikely to ripen properly or be edible in our climate. The fruits are green with a hard stone seed and turn black when ripe.

Olives are slow growing trees. They are evergreen and develop a rounded head. They have long grey-green leaves whose undersides are a silvery grey-green. Olives will grow outside in more sheltered coastal locations in

the West Country but they react badly to cold winds, from the east especially, and can easily defoliate. They may well recover from this with a little dieback in more mature plants with a woody stem.

All olives respond well, especially indoors, to regular monthly liquid fertiliser feeds.

Probably the only olives worth attempting are *Olea europaea* or *Olea europaea* 'El Greco' which are proven to be the only really suitable plants for growing outdoors in the UK.



Olea europaea



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Olea europaea 'El Greco'

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