

The olive trees

The olive tree, or *oliva*, is a fruit tree that is thought to be native to Asia Minor and Syria, since in this region the wild olive tree has been widespread since ancient times, forming forests on the southern coast of Asia Minor.

Nowadays, even in the areas near Lake Garda, numerous varieties of olives are grown, such as Gargnà, Casaliva and Miol, while on the eastern shore the presence of Raza is predominant, even if Favarol, Gargnà and Casaliva, Trep and Miol are also present.



Here, in fact, the Phoenicians began to cultivate it, discovering its great properties, to which they gave the special name of ἔλαια that the Latins rendered as *olea*.

It has been used since ancient times for food. Olives, its fruits, are used for the extraction of olive oil and, to a lesser extent, for direct use in food.

Due to the bitter taste, the use of olives as fruits in food requires specific treatments aimed at de-bittering (reduction of bitter principles), achieved with various methods.

The olive tree performs valuable environmental functions by mitigating climate change.

It belongs to the *Oleaceae* family and the *Olea* genus.

Olive trees and organic farming

A seven-year study on olive crops has shown that this plant is able to store six thousand tons of carbon, which is equivalent to twenty-two thousand tons of carbon dioxide. In fact, to combat global warming, organic farming and olive trees are excellent allies.

There are different types of greenhouse gases in our atmosphere, and not all of them are harmful; however, since the industrial revolution, some of these harmful gases have increased significantly, and numerous elements not present in nature have been added.

Organic farming includes many practices aimed at safeguarding the agroecosystem and sequestering carbon in the soil, such as: crop rotation, reduction and intensity of mechanical tillage of the land, the use of fallow land and the use of organic fertilizers.

The strong connection between olive cultivation and the practice of organic farming has been demonstrated.



In general, one and a half billion olive trees in 10 million hectares represent a fantastic ally in the world against environmental degradation. A crop present throughout the globe, with a notable presence in the Mediterranean area (95% of world olive oil production). In Italy, 180 million olive trees are grown on a surface area of 1.2 million hectares, of which 80% according to the conventional method of agricultural production and 20% according to the method (regulated by a specific EU Regulation) of organic farming.



Characteristics

The olive tree is an evergreen and broadleaf tree, whose vegetative activity is almost continuous, with attenuation in the winter period. It has slow growth and is very long-lived: in favorable climatic conditions it can become a thousand-year-old and reach heights of 15-20 meters. The plant begins to produce the first fruits 3-4 years after planting, and begins to be fully productive after 9-10 years.

The roots are expanded and superficial: they generally do not go beyond 0.7-1 meter in depth.

The trunk is cylindrical and twisted, with gray or dark gray bark and hard and heavy wood.

The crown has a conical shape, with fruit-bearing branches and pendulous or patent branches (arranged horizontally with respect to the trunk) according to the variety

The leaves are opposite, simple, entire, with a short petiole and entire margin. The lower surface is silvery white due to the presence of scale-like hairs.



The flower, small, with a calyx of 4 sepals and a corolla of white petals. The flowers are grouped in numbers of 10–15 in cluster inflorescences, called "mignole", are emitted at the axil of the leaves of the twigs of the previous year.

The actual flowering occurs from May to the first half of June.



The fruit is made up of a "fleshy" part (pulp) that contains oil and a woody and wrinkled stone. The weight of the fruit varies between 1-6 grams depending on the species, the cultivation technique used and the climate. October-December is the harvest period, which depends on the crops and the use to be made of it: whether for oil or for the table.



The olive tree is suitable for the construction of furniture, floors, plates, mortars and cutlery as it does not absorb liquids. It is also ideal as firewood for stoves and in the kitchen it is excellent for pizzas and focaccias.



History of the olive tree

The history of the olive tree and its characteristics is deeply linked to that of humanity. Appearing for the first time in Western Asia, the olive tree spread throughout the Mediterranean area, where its cult was consecrated by all religions. Since ancient times, the olive tree was considered a transcendent symbol of spirituality and sacredness. Synonymous with fertility and rebirth, resistance to the ravages of time and war, a symbol of peace and value, the olive tree represented in mythology, as in religion, a natural element of strength and purification.



Benefits

Olive oil obtained from ripe fruits is used in cosmetics. Particularly hydrating and nourishing on the skin and hair. Excellent for dry, irritated skin and sunburn.

Olives and the oil obtained from them are typical foods of the Mediterranean diet. Rich in vitamin E, vitamin K, polyphenols, unsaturated fats and mineral salts. Widely used for seasoning and for making first and second courses. Extra virgin olive oil is particularly beneficial when used raw on foods for the daily diet.

olive oil is an excellent ingredient for making creams, body oils and hair oils. It promotes the penetration of water through the lipophilic channels of the skin and can therefore be considered a good aid for hydration. With a composition similar to the skin's sebum, for this reason it penetrates easily and is protective and emollient. Olive

leaves are used on the skin for their astringent action. Useful for washing and purifying the skin or as a mouthwash.

Olive trees in medicine and herbalism



The olive tree has been present in the history of Mediterranean medicine and herbalism for several millennia. All civilizations have used it as a food plant, as a fuel supplier and for lighting and also as a medicinal plant; olive oil, in addition to being a very popular medicine, has always been used as a fundamental component of numerous herbal preparations, and even the leaves, although to a more limited extent, have been used for medicinal purposes. Middle Eastern populations made extensive use of olive oil. In autumn, the olives were harvested when not completely ripe, they were crushed with a mortar, and the first oil that was obtained was intended for temple lamps, the next for food and the preparation of medicinal or cosmetic ointments. A very widespread popular remedy was olive oil mixed with wine. In classical Greek medicine, olive oil was used for friction and massage, and as a vehicle for other medicines. The same occurred in Arab medicine and then in medieval medicine in Mediterranean countries. The leaves were also used by all the Mediterranean peoples as an astringent, tonic and antipyretic. Towards the middle of the 16th century the author Andrea Mattioli provides abundant information on the medicinal properties of olive leaves. In particular, he says of the wild olive: "The leaves ... the juice & their decoration ... are usefully put in eye drops, which are made for the corrosion of the eyelids

A few decades later, in 1585, another significant author, Castore Durante, in his “Herbario Nuovo”, took up the subject of olive leaves again, documenting their properties and uses in great detail

Sitography

<https://www.schirinzi.it/olio-e-dintorni/storia-ulivo-mito-e-leggenda/>

<https://www.teatronaturale.it/strettamente-tecnico/l-arca-olearia/36482-l-utilizzo-dell-olivo-in-erboristeria-dall-antichita-all-attualita.htm>.

<https://www.suoloesalute.it/gli-ulivi-e-lagricoltura-biologica-contro-linquinamento/#:~:text=Uno%20studio%2C%20durato%20sette%20anni,22mila%20tonnellate%20di%20anidride%20carbonica>.

<https://www.vglobale.it/2020/06/23/ecco-come-il-biologico-aiuta-il-clima/>

https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olea_europaea

<https://www.erbecedario.it/it/olivo>

Istituto Comprensivo 1-Lower Secondary School Beschi - Class 3F - Castiglione delle Stiviere (Mantova)