Life among the olives

Magic of Olive Tree

Dr Vera Sergeeva
The olive tree is declared by many to be the perfect botanical specimen. A tree with a heart and soul, it provides health-enriching products, is beautiful to behold and is extremely hardy, being resistant to both fire and drought.

Olive trees are broad-leaved evergreen trees grown for their fruits which are used for food and oil. They also are grown as ornamentals. Olive trees can live for centuries, and in many communities are as treasured and precious as antiques.
The ancients said: The Mediterranean begins and ends with the olive tree, indicating the very close and intimate connection between the plant and the geographical area. At the end of the Middle Ages the views of the countries bordering the Mediterranean had become thick with olive groves, and the olive oil trade once again reached the importance of the ancient trades.
Ancient olive trees

‘The Sisters’ of Noah, Lebanon

Gethsemane, Israel

Vouves, Crete, Greece

Mirovica, Near Bar, Montenegro

Alentejo, Portugal

Puglia, Italy
Located on the Greek island of Crete is a remarkable piece of living antiquity. Estimated at anywhere from 3,000 to 5,000 years old, the ‘Vouves Olive Tree’ is fittingly treasured as a Living Monument and still produces highly-prized olives to this day. In terms of valued produce, however, the Vouves olive tree has some stiff competition from Northern Lebanon. Trees called ‘The Sisters’ produce an award-winning extra virgin olive oil with extremely high polyphenols and acidity levels of between 0.18° and 0.24°. The taste is described as intense, fruity, medium pepper, with a palette of fresh grass; buttery with notes of almond and walnut.

‘The Sisters’ are said to be from an undocumented olive tree variety, an ancestor of the Balasi Ayrouni. Dating from more than 6000 years ago, the variety is even claimed to be ‘the’ source of that olive branch brought by the dove back to Noah heralding the end of the flood.
The Saharan cousin of Mediterranean olive trees remains largely unknown. However, this subspecies (called the Laperinne's olive tree) is of great interest for several reasons. Extremely drought-resistant, this "relic" tree could act as a genetic resource to improve its domestic counterparts, provided conservation actions are implemented to prevent its disappearance.
Centuries-old olive trees

Photo: by Leonardo Shcena, Italy

Photo: by Alfonso Cevola, Italy

Photo: by Antonio Trapero, Spain

Photo: by Leonardo Shcena, Italy
Centuries-old olive trees

Corsica, France

Ithaca, Greece

Galilee, Israel

Bar, Montenegro
Monumental olive trees

The Senia territory in Spain claims the highest concentration of ‘monumental’ olive trees. In particular, there are currently a total of 4,761 olive trees with a trunk perimeter measure of more than 3.50m (measured 1.30m from the ground).
Monumental olive trees

The beautiful millennial olive, located in Traiguera (Castellon), which is full of life and whose production is intended to develop the territory Sénia Millennium olive oil
Monumental olive trees
Monumental olive trees
Photo: by Aceite Olivos Milenarios Territorio Sénia

PAISAJE HISTÓRICO DE OLIVOS MILENARIOS DEL TERRITORIO SÉNIA
THE HISTORICAL LANDSCAPE OF THE SÉNIA'S ANCIENT OLIVE TREES

EUROPEAN UNION PRIZE FOR CULTURAL HERITAGE/ EUROPA NOSTRA AWARDS 2014
Old olive trees, estimated to be 3,000 years old, supported by bricks, Puglia, Italy.

Passionate about Puglia

Photo: by Leonardo Schena

Photo: by Jane Avery

Photo: by ulivisecolaridipuglia

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Photo: by ulivisecolaridipuglia
Olive tree grown on an old abandoned water cistern, Puglia, Italy
How little soil they need

Trees are ubiquitous in the stony ground, Israel

Meknes (Mequinez), Morocco
Old Samaria village, Crete, Greece

Olive orchards above ruins, Knossos, Greece

Dougga (Thugga) ruins, Tunisia

Photo: by Profburp, wikimedia

Olive trees on the way in Samaria Gorge (18 km long)

Sparta, Greece

Lower Beth-Horan, Jerusalem

Photo: by Vera Sergeeva

Old Samaria village, Crete, Greece
Terraced stone walls support olive trees on the hillside

Stone wall built around old olive trees to increase the tree’s nutritional surface area
The stone walls "tramizzi" protect from wind olive trees Zinzala of Bonifacio- Corsica
Olive terraces

Balearic island, Spain

Douro Valley, Portugal
Ancient olive trees in Dalmatia, Croatia; some reputed to be older than 1,500 years and still producing an abundant harvest
The tree of wisdom: In several cultures the tradition says that the olive tree was gifted to people. Thus, the symbol of goddess Athena beside the owl symbolized an olive branch.

The tree of peace: Irena, the god of peace, daughter of Zeus and Themed, was always depicted with an olive branch in her hand. Later, in periods of war, the couriers of peace were sent holding a symbolic olive branch in their hand.

The tree of hope: In the Old Testament a dove returns with an olive branch in the ark, in order to announce the end of flood and bring hope to people.

The tree of light: The olive oil was used as lighting oil and thus it was considered to be source of light.

The tree of fertility: In folk tradition of Greek medicine the olive oil is considered to be aphrodisiac. People offered to new couples oval-shaped bread, on which they poured the first oil of the year, as an antidote to sterility.

The tree of health: The value of olive oil to the health is widely known for centuries. Thus, the olive tree symbolizes power and health. Moreover, this symbolism is totally accurate due to the fact that olive trees are long-lived and resistant.

The tree of wealth: For many families the olive trees and their products represent the main source of income.

The tree of balance: The olive tree was considered to be the tree of balance by the Celts. For this reason they devoted the day of 23rd of September to it as that particular date the day has the same duration as the night.
The oldest olive trees have survived many wars, diseases, natural disasters and human negligence and are still bearing fruits. This is one of the reasons why the olive tree is regarded as a symbol of patience: looking at an olive tree gives a feeling of serenity, peace and tranquility. Furthermore, the olive tree is the symbol of immortality: it gives power to kings and priests, and its boughs crown heroes and Olympic champions.
Olive tree in Agrigento, Sicily – symbol of peace and the human spirit

“Blessed are those who give without remembering and take without ever forgetting” {Sicilian Arabic Blessing}
Winners of the Olympic Games are crowned with olive branches.

Olive oil and the olive tree have a very strong religious symbolism. Olive oil is referred to more than 140 times in the Bible, and the olive tree is mentioned over one hundred times. In the Quran and the Ahadith (sayings and actions of the Prophet) and in the Hebrew Bible, there are numerous references to olive oil as well.

Olive oil is one of the four most important symbols in Christianity along with bread, wine and water.
Olive plantations
Olive plantations

Andalusia, Spain
Harvesting in 1930s

Mechanised olive harvester
High density plantations
Harvesting in Modern Olives / Boundary Bend, Australia
There are hundreds of varieties of olive trees all over the world, some new and some over a thousand years old.
Olive tree nursery
Olive tree and wind

Tipasa

Photo: by Vera Sergeeva

Kurion

Photo: by N.Sirkarev, flickr.com

Photo by AEO, Spain
Unique in the world centuries-old olive trees in Puglia, Italy

Wind blown olive trees
A very different way of viewing an olive tree
Olive tree on the outskirts of Rome

Experimental olive tree in Egypt

Lonely Olive

Olive tree on the outskirts of Rome

Beautiful olive tree in Israel overlooking the Sea of Galilee

Lonely Olive Tree in Deià
The battle of life

Largest olive tree in Australia

Smallest olive tree

Photo: by Antonio Trapero, Spain

Western Australia

Photo: by John Wholly

Victoria state
Ornamental olives

The ancient art of transplanting olive trees
Olive tree garden

Spain

Portugal

Piazza del Duomo, Tuscany, Italy
This 800 year old olive tree was planted in an Abu Dhabi development as a “centerpiece to be something unique”, chosen for its “character and historic significance”, imported from Lebanon. Never too old to travel!
Macrobonsai

Macrobonsai the art is 400 years old and can reach 10 meters in height. This example is one the Vía Verde de Barrio Peral, Spain.
Bonsai olive tree may sound like a myth...
Indoor olive trees
Olive tree sculptures

Park of Olives
Environmental Sculpture and Planting
Museum of the Olive and Greek Olive-Oil, Sparta

The Olive Tree Museum of Vouves, Crete, Greece

Museo de la Cultura del olivo Baeza (Jaén), Spain

Edremit olive oil museum, Turkey

Olive plantations near museum
Olive oil was bottled as a medicine and purchased from chemist (1950-1970).

Original olive oil amphora extant in Phaistos archaeological site, Crete.

Ancient olive oil pot

Remains from ancient olive oil making in museum space below Pula’s Roman amphitheater.

8000 year-old fragment olive oil

Olive oil was bottled as a medicine and purchased from chemist (1950-1970)

Courtesy Powerhouse Museum, Australia
Olive oil
Olive oil bolsters the immune system and helps to protect against viruses. Olive oil has also been found to be effective in fighting against diseases such as: cancer, heart disease, oxidative stress, diabetes, obesity, rheumatoid arthritis, osteoporosis.

Olive is antiseptic, astringent and is known to lower blood pressure and fevers.
The Romans of course used olive oil to cleanse their skin as part of their bathing ritual.
Mediterranean women with their glorious glossy hair have known for centuries the value of applying warm olive oil to revive dry lifeless hair.

Less familiar are the medicinal benefits, which include making use of the leaves and bark as well.
The ancients saw olive oil as healing, no matter what was wrong with you.
A rub down with olive oil would help your body to heal itself.
Massage is extremely healing on its own, a coating of olive oil would double this effect.

Kew's Herbarium, Kew Gardens in London, contains a wreath of folded olive leaves, which was found in the sarcophagus of King Tutankhamun, and is over 3,300 years old.
The health benefits of olive oil are extensive with new positive attributes discovered all the time. The recommended dose is at least two tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil each day to enjoy the many ways olive oil can be beneficial to your health and well being.
Sardines marinated with caviar of olive oil

Freezing fresh herbs in olive oil to preserve them

Sliced feta with oregano and olive oil

Olive oil caviar with prosciutto

Ice cream with olive oil

Kalamata olive ice cream

Chocolate mousse with olive oil
Olive oil in cosmetics, shaving oil and soaps

Olive leaf extract

Olive leaf tea
Hand made with olive wood
Interior design

Olive tree and its products stamp, Cyprus, 2014

1954 Greek 20 lepta

1957 Italian 100 Lire

Golden olive tree in a meeting room

Metal wall sculpture

Ceramic tiles Olive Tree of Jerusalem
Digital Art
ODE TO OLIVE OIL

From hard green drupes of bitter flesh, a river of gold and green
From trees bent like old women whose leaves flash olive drab to silver in the hot breeze, a bowlful of summer
The transmutation: flesh of the tree to liquid amber
Picked by hand, collected in nets, the willow baskets fill with fruit, spill into wooden boxes, are crushed between wheels of stone, pits and all.

You can marry it with aceto balsamico to dress your salad, gilding emerald and ruby leaves. You can ladle it on white beans and sage, drizzle it on sun-warm tomatoes, lace it in minestrone, bathe garlic heads for roasting. You can make it into soap, rub it with mint leaves for migraine. Take a spoonful to prevent hangover. Mash it with rosemary and all the pain is gone from creaky knees. Velvet on the tongue. The light of late afternoons. I am eating sunshine, spread on bread; primroses open in my mouth. My chin gleams yellow, the opposite of a halo, but one surely even the saints would recognize and bless.
Following Olive Footprints - Cultivation and Culture, Folklore and History, Tradition and Uses
The title of this book has been chosen to reflect its documentary nature and its pivotal theme of “Olive and People”. Featuring written contributions 99 authors from 41 countries.

http://www.internationaloliveoil.org/store/index/49-general-publications
Thank you