



# Pickled & Pressed Summer 2008

Hi Association Members

Pay back time for all that hard work as harvest time approaches. Down on the groves of members I have spoken to recently - things are generally looking good. Time to clean those crates and rakes and dust off the catchers, speculate about tonnages and yields and talk to processors.

In this edition you can read about our Seminar on 15<sup>th</sup> March when Ron Turner, Jos Weemaes, Tony Dingle and Susie Moscovitch came to share their stories, their enthusiasm and their determination to succeed in selling their products into the market at prices where they could more than cover their costs. Not only did they give us their time but they also willingly gave us lots of useful tips and insights into how they were doing it and on what to, and not, to do.

There are some great stories from members and also articles on olive lace bug, on why the spreading of lime and fertiliser need to be done as separate operations and recipes for table olives.

**Date for your diary – ‘Olive Oil Tasting Day’ at Gooram on 21<sup>st</sup> June.** It's important that you know what your oil tastes like and how you want it to taste – this will enable you to describe and also blend it. Susie Moscovitch stressed the importance of producing a quality product so that customers keep coming back – they will only come back for more if the quality of your product is what they are looking for not because you have an attractive label or are good at marketing.

Thank you again to those who have contributed to this edition – much appreciated by me and other Members.

Irene Laing

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## President's Report

Dear GSOGA Members,

Life has been a bit of an impressionistic blur recently – with ripening olives mixing in the mind's eye with scale insects and lacebugs and thieving rosellas, and crates and picking frames and columns of figures about making money in the grove! The actual harvest will be hard work, but it may give the mind a rest from thinking about all these things at the same time.

We found the recent seminar on “Making Money in a Small Grove” fascinating and inspiring – but also honest about the hard facts. All the speakers agreed that making money is much more difficult than the forecasts of ten years ago would have implied. But they were honest about saying that money is not the only thing we want from our groves. And they told powerful stories about how a focus on quality, and on getting close to the final customer, can move your selling price from \$5 a litre to \$10 or \$20 a litre.

And Susie Moscovitch reminded us that quality in olive oil is about flavour – and if we don't know how to taste oil systematically we cannot hope to “drive” the quality of our oils effectively. Now oil tasting tends to be seen as “secret business” for a chosen few, which the rest of us will never really understand. The GSOGA Committee want to help our members break through this barrier; most of us will never be expert enough to be on a judging panel, but – just as with wine – we can train ourselves so that we can identify the main components of flavour and know how to make a systematic comparison. So we are planning to hold a seminar on 21st June at Gooram focussed on “Oil tasting for the Small Grower”

But before then we will be working on the harvest – hoping for calm days, reliable machinery, and lots of good oil.

We hope this is how it comes out for you.

Best wishes for a great harvest

Andrew Laing



Susie with her Nagambie Good oil –  
focusing on quality

## How to make a profit from a Small Grove Seminar

15<sup>th</sup> March 2008

### Presentation by Ron Turner, Strathaven Olives

My presentation was completed on fact or actual costs incurred to complete the 2007 harvest, there were many other costs left unconsidered because the Olive program thus far at my farm has been developed this way. I have always considered the development of any new enterprise regardless of type or size will carry high establishment costs that can be only described as a write off factor, by contrast if one was to consider the purchase of an established Olive enterprise all costs would be considered. As quoted during my presentation anybody purchasing an Olive enterprise would consider what the transaction would cost as related to the returns. Obviously to be absolutely accurate all costs should be considered.

We formed the Association to support commercial procedures, most all of the objectives and targets for the group were set to create a successful commercial enterprise. Following the 2007 harvest, after completing an actual cost exercise and a forecasted 2008 costing, and now at year nine, for me it is obvious I can never support sales into the bulk supply industry at present prices.

This now indicates to me the Association may need to refocus on its objectives which may only relate to small individual growers producing and most importantly Value Adding to the point of being able to promote and sell the range of products into selected markets, this is not easy, because to do this you have to be prepared to become diverse, you need to be prepared to finance bulk purchasing of all the items required to take the product to its next stage, be able to physically handle pallet loads and be able to store them, for this reason unless the bulk market becomes more realistic with much higher prices, I can see a majority of the present industry participants departing.

This of course will have a disastrous affect on the Industry representatives, the VOC and the AOA both already in serious trouble with lack of members and in the case of the AOA financially in trouble. I feel our Association could well become involved with the VOC, and with the appropriate approval to promote and or the re-establishment of the Victorian Associations now apparently defunct, without these numbers the Industry will not survive in Victoria.

Either way, as previously stated there is a future for our products, some of us are already operating successfully, disappointing to some extent, it is not as originally expected but there is a way. If you have confidence in your products, enter them in several shows, I received eleven awards in 2006 and another four in 2007, one of these was a gold for our label or packaging, these awards speak volumes for the quality of the products, even the label award when speaking to client and they remark on the label it is nice to agree and confirm by advising even the industry thinks so because it received a gold award for its presentation and description. It is relatively easy to sell the product when some other authority has made the quality judgment for you.

The grouping procedure is one of these ways, it will take a lot of organizing with selected understanding compatible people, within your Association, within your locality, within your product range and variety and within your marketing expectations, this concept has already been discussed with selected capable growers.

Congratulations to the organizing committee, some of the faces have changed, the fellowship, goodwill and very good company is still shining through.

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## Presentation by Tony Dingle – Maldon Olive Grove



Maldon Olive Grove is a small grove of 16 acres on the outskirts of Maldon in the Central Victorian Goldfields. It is situated on the southern slope of the Nuggetty Ranges. Its soils are acid on a granite base and the average rainfall is 550mm, but we have not experienced that for a while. It is typically very hot in summer and cold in winter with morning frosts. Currently we have 700 trees, most of which were planted in 2000 and 2001, but 200 of these are Nevadillo Blanco, that is to say useless, so in reality we have only 500 productive trees. A hundred of these are Kalamata, the fruit of which we sell off the tree each year and which I will not mention further. The rest are oiling varieties, Frantoio, Corregiola,

Leccino and Barnea. We irrigate from a very saline bore, 3,000 plus PPM, but the trees have survived on it for more than four years.

When Val and I look back we cannot remember why we decided to begin a grove rather than some other kind of farming enterprise, but it was predominantly a lifestyle/retirement decision. Making money – to quote title of the seminar- was only a minor issue. The grove would be something to occupy and challenge us in retirement – which looked to be only 5-6 years away when we started but has stretched out to now. Had our main aim been to make money we would have tried something very different, probably property investments [however, the rise in rural property values, and consequently the value of our grove has been a significant bonus].

We made two strategic decisions at the outset. First, while profit was not the motive, we decided that we would not keep going if we could not cover costs. Second, given what we wanted from the enterprise, we would not cost our own labour. We need the exercise and we found the idea of adopting something akin to the lifestyle of an Italian peasants attractive after a lifetime of work indoors. We did our Business Plan, submitted it and were awarded primary producer status and have benefitted from the tax breaks that go with that. The ATO has also kindly let us offset our losses against income earned from other sources. This was not vital to our decision to establish a grove, but it has made a big difference financially. In particular it has encouraged me in an endless search for more toys to hang off the back of the tractor. All of them have, of course, proved vital in the grove.

We began in ignorance. Our main source of information on everything was Olives Australia in Queensland. We used their data on yields per tree – nothing for 3 years, then in year four we could expect 10 kilos, rising to 20 kilos in year five, followed by a 10 kilo increase each year thereafter. Alas, that is far in excess of our experience. However, they also suggested that processors would offer 60c per kilo for fruit - even though some were offering \$1 in 1999 - which converts roughly to \$3 per litre of oil. We now recognise that is a very poor price and well below our costs of production, even with free labour, but initially we did not think much about marketing our product. The main fascination was to grow and produce good oil. We were naïve and just assumed that a market for Australian oil existed, or would

soon emerge. Comparisons with the Australian wine industry were frequently drawn at that time and encouraged a careless optimism.

Jumping three years ahead brings us to our first crop worth processing. It was not large enough to sell to processors and by this time prices were falling and processors and others had become increasingly choosy about what they would buy. We had the fruit processed, bottled the oil ourselves and gave it to family, friends and work colleagues. In this way we hoped we could build up in them a craving and a dependence on our fine oil, which would bring them back once we began to charge them for it. We began increasingly to think that we could and should do our own marketing.

We got a designer to do a label for us. I thought the resulting design pleasant but mundane, but customers have been far more positive, seeing in it all the right messages, that our oil is clean and green and healthy – and good for you – which of course it is. Gradually we realised that we could market small quantities of oil to work and social contacts at a price that, while not price competitive with the stuff on the supermarket shelf, was competitive with other good oil, both local and imported. A minority of our customers are knowledgeable about oil and know exactly what they want, but most are uninformed but curious and want to know more. The educative process is vital. People want to know what 'cold pressed' and 'extra virgin' means. They want to taste oil before they buy, so a sample and some bread is a great marketing tool. They subsequently give their friends a taste and hopefully they become customers also. For example, people at Val's gym buy around 30 bottles a year at \$20 a bottle while at my workplace I sell a great deal more than that. Orders are typically by word of mouth. This is an old fashioned, personalised, way of selling that customers seem to enjoy. It has some similarities to the old milk delivery roundsman - although without the horse and cart. On our sales records Val notes which oil each person buys – we bottle our varieties separately- so when someone wants more of what they had last time but cannot recall what that was, we can tell them and supply. They buy oil for Christmas presents and at least some of the recipients enjoy it and want to get more for themselves. This is a dynamic that helps grow the business.

It would be an exaggeration to claim we had a fully thought out marketing strategy. We have simply tried out what we identified as the possible opportunities available to us to see which would work. Ironically perhaps our main constraint has been our limited supplies of oil [ although after every harvest Val looks at how much oil we have produced and worries that we will never sell it all]. With our modest quantities selling in bulk is simply not an option nor is it possible to supply a large retailer. In 2005, our first serious harvest, we picked 2.25 tons of fruit. The following year was disastrous for us with just under 1 ton. We were forced to source oil from a neighbouring grove to keep all of our customers supplied. Last year we picked just under 4 tons.

Our marketing goal has been to sell these volumes, so what have we learnt?

- Initially we tried placing our oil in a few local shops in Maldon and Williamstown but sales have been modest. This avenue has not been effective for us.
- We have not tried farmers markets, mainly because neither of us wants to spend four hours standing behind a stall in extreme heat or cold. We know some who do sell there and a few who do really well in this way, but there is usually a lot of competition. At my workplace a Christmas present market has been organised for the last two years and that has been successful for us.
- We have an agreement with one Italian restaurant in Melbourne that uses our oil for everything it does, cooking, dressings etc. It is our biggest single customer by far taking several hundred litres each year in 30 or 15 litre containers that we supply and recycle. We charge \$10 per litre, our base price, but very little labour input is required for each sale. Last year this one source took two thirds of our oil by volume but generated only one third of our revenue. It is an interesting challenge selling in this way. The chef knows exactly what he does and does not want and we must supply it. We want to develop this kind of business further and are negotiating with another restaurant that will hopefully do the same thing if it can carve out a market niche for itself. A third restaurant also buys our oil but only for use with bread on tables. They use cheaper oil for cooking and we do not want to match the price at which they can buy

that. I keep complaining to them that I can taste the cheap oil which is spoiling their otherwise fine food, but so far they have not heeded my warning. Generally I believe that this side of the business has the best prospects for a major expansion in the volume of oil that we move in the future.

- Direct retailing I have already touched on earlier. We sell oil in 250 ml and 750ml bottles for \$10 and \$20 respectively. There is a lot of work involved in value adding; filtering, bottling, labelling, delivering, but two thirds of our revenues come from here, overwhelmingly from 750ml bottles. This uses about a third of our oil. There are going to be limits on the expansion of this form of selling because it is so labour intensive, but so far we have not met them and volumes continue to expand solidly. It is underpinned by a few customers who get through prodigious quantities of oil – either for their own use or as presents to give to others. Our best customer, who shall remain nameless so that no-one can poach him, has co-opted his neighbour to purchase equally prodigious quantities. While this might seem a somewhat haphazard form of selling, it has its own inbuilt dynamic as I noted above, but it is vital to stay in contact with customers and supply whenever oil is needed.

So far I have said little about costs but it is the crucial issue for the small producer. Will you cost your own labour? If you do not, and if you have time available, then small groves of up to 1000 trees are in a very cost effective situation. The two major processes of harvesting and pruning can be done by hand or with some help from hand held but powered pruners and harvesters. Ultimately this is a matter of attitude. People say to us isn't it really hard work doing both these jobs. Our reply is that it is a lot better than many other things we have had to do at our paid work. Physically the setting is delightful, the work takes a long time and one is tired at the end of the day, but it is far from arduous. The company is good and there is plenty of job satisfaction and mental exercise, especially in pruning. Val and I may do only 40 trees a day or so less, and we know shaker will do that in an hour, but that will cost \$3 a tree for a retrieval rate of less than 80 % if you harvest early, as we do. We get 98% of all our fruit. If oil is selling for \$10 a litre there is seven left after mechanical shaking and another \$2 or more will go in processing costs. The margin quickly gets eroded in this way. So, small groves have a comparative advantage here for the peasant owner working with her or his own free energy and muscles. Bigger groves must hire in costly machinery or extra labour.

There are some time limits on harvesting for quality oil. Val and I working alone did 4 tons last year in a little over a fortnight. I believe we can do 10-12 tons in twice that time once the extra fruit is on the trees, so long as we pace ourselves, like good peasants always do, and keep rubbing in the arthritis cream. One handicap for the small producer is the pricing policy adopted by most processors when they charge more for pressing small consignments. It is difficult for small groves picking by hand to get together somewhere between a half and three quarters of a ton of fruit in less than two days picking. It might be worth using a cool store [not a cold store GH-P should you chance to read this] to keep fruit in top condition for perhaps 3-5 days while accumulating an optimal consignment to take to the processor and get the best possible price. There is a literature detailing experiments with cool stores used in his way that indicates promising results.

Small cheap mechanical aids are the way to go but you need to be discriminating. We bought a hand held harvester, of a brand that I will not mention, that made me slower than when I used a hand rake. We do not want to use the extensive nets that are needed to catch the fruit thrown about by some hand held clappers because it takes so long to lay and retrieve them. We prefer our own lightweight catcher that can be moved quickly and easily from tree to tree. Recently some hand held harvesters have appeared which do not fire fruit in all directions and we hope to see a trial of one of these in the upcoming harvest. Home made catchers, gravity filtering, hand bottling and labels printed on the computer and applied by hand, all keep down costs. There are lots of cheap aids to keep down costs so long as you have the labour time available and are willing to use it in this way. Small groves need to take the peasant route so far as labour is concerned and I think that the ways we are producing and selling our oil owes much to the ways peasants have traditionally produced and sold their surpluses, with the difference that we have professional labels – even if they are stuck on by hand.

Where to next for us?

- We need to set up a web site to hopefully attract new customers and also keep in touch with existing customers.
- We need to persuade more restaurants to use our oil for salads and on the table, or better still for cooking. The Italian connection is vital here.
- One direction that we could take stems from our location on the outskirts of Maldon, a major tourist centre. There is scope to develop a tourist trade with 'cellar door' sales, a walk around the grove and a look at a processing plant, a traditional press would be better than a centrifuge for this purpose. This would probably double our bottle sales, but it would involve giving over Saturday and Sunday to being nice to tourists. We are unlikely to do this. But someone else could.
- If it all gets too much for us as we become older and more decrepit, a charming olive grove with a nice house should fetch a good price.



## Olives, Wallabies & Alpacas - Paul Wainscott

Along with 6 ex-friends we planted 500 "low vigour" olives trees over a weekend in September 2006. The weather that followed virtually turned them into "no vigour" trees with very little evidence of growth. However rainfall briefly re-visited our area in late summer & most trees started to show some promise. But after a while, just like some of my share funds, they suddenly started to show negative growth becoming smaller and smaller. Further research showed that our new trees had become the staple diet of a family of wallabies, (cute little fellas up to that point), who were munching the trees each evening.

This called for a consultation with the local Publopedia, (where I gain most of my wisdom and knowledge these days). Obviously the answer from the locals was to shoot the "b-----s", uttered of course by guys who when push came to shove would be as reluctant to pull the trigger as I was. Another suggestion was an electric fence and this idea appealed to me; "it will have to be fairly high though"; "how high is fairly high?"; higher than they can jump of course!".

Having worked out that I was on my own with this one I tried to do a bit of creative thinking, beginning by trying to put myself in the wallabies shoes. Which parts of my body would I least like to be zapped? Firstly the head, secondly....yes... the reproductive region. The head height was easy but the other measurement involved a fair bit of guess work.. Anyway I ended up erecting a presentable looking electric fence which had consistent voltage around the perimeter & we then spent the next few evenings watching the wallabies squeeze between the tapes to continue their munching.

What they didn't realize is that like Baldrick, I had a cunning plan; - an earth wire running between the two tapes, eliminating all but microscopic sized Wallabies. This time they enjoyed it so much that they invited several friends and relatives to join them on their olive/electro-stimulation evenings. This was getting serious!

Desperately I sought another consultation with the Publopedia. This time there was a 'Pub Whisper' that Alpacas would keep wallabies etc. away and not eat the trees or the olives. For those of you who don't know what a 'Pub Whisper' is, it's fantastic information usually available after about 8pm in your local pub. The origins don't seem particularly important at the time but try to get confirmation even the next day you will find the information seriously downgraded or totally denied by the purveyor. But it was desperate times for us with the trees literally disappearing before our eyes each day, we didn't think we had much to lose by giving it a try.

We purchased two wethers from Flowerdale Estate, nicely colour coordinated in brown and white, one called "Gaelic Prince", the other "79217" (we really must get him named and registered). After they were dropped off at our property they spent the next 3 weeks staring at the gate they had been delivered



through and making squeaking noises which I interpreted as meaning "we don't like it here we want to go home" But wait for it.....the Wallabies started to graze more & more on the neighbour's side of the fence, - he doesn't have Olives, only weeds, and eventually no more on our property.

The next questions, do Alpacas eat olives? Well they don't eat our olives, I suspect that even if they found them palatable their mouth structure would be a problem. The trees?. When the alpacas first arrived they seemed to want to try everything including Jane's roses and I did see them nibbling on the leaves of some mature olive trees. However they stopped and in the 5 months since they have not been detected eating the trees. This may be because they seem to have a preference overall for dry food. They particularly enjoyed dried out prunings which I had left underneath the trees, this of course could prove to be another major discovery and send the price of mulchers plummeting.

Our young trees have all recovered, a lot are fruiting this season, Wallabies keep their distance & we have 2 new pets who cost us \$23 every 6 weeks for a bale of Lucerne Hay (Alpaca caviar).

If you are suffering a Wallabie/Kangaroo problem in your grove, I suppose you want to know whether I recommend that you buy Alpacas? Well keep your ear to the ground I might just be starting another "Pub Whisper"!



### Olive Lace Bug

This is what I asked - "If anyone has Olive Lace Bug and has some clues on how to suppress them that I can pass on then again please let me know". Below are the responses:

Hi Irene

Dimethoate fenthion (organophosphate) was registered for use on olive lace bugs to 1 Feb '08. I don't know if that registration has been renewed.

There's also Natrasoap insecticidal soap spray, a potassium spray, that sounds a lot safer than the fenthion product.

<http://permits.apvma.gov.au/PER6460.PDF>

I've been told that lacewings have been used with some success but you'd need to talk to the growers who used them. Wes from "Bugs for Bugs" did not sound very confident.

Russ Knight  
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Hi Russ

Thank you for your suggestions. We're organic so not sure we would be allowed to use the Dimethoate Fenthion (**DEFINITELY A NO-NO ... & IT KILLS BIRDS**). We are currently trying Natrasoap with white oil but are not convinced it is really working. We have also tried Pyrethrum but both of these are short term solutions. We introduced lacewings from Bugs for Bugs about 18 months ago but they must have died or flown without eating a bug and without trace!! (**MIGHT BE WORTH ANOTHER TRY?? BUT I'D TALK TO OTHER USERS FIRST**)

The key to success with fighting all pests is to grow healthy trees - it's interesting that only half a dozen of our trees have just a few scale this year but it's the not so healthy ones that have succumbed to olive lace bug - bugs don't seem to go for healthy trees so got to keep the nutrition up. (**& WATER ... WATER STRESS MAKES TREES VULNERABLE TO LACE BUGS APPARENTLY**)

Hi Irene,

We had a problem with olive lace bug during 2003-2005. It was quite wide spread. We tried organic methods from Hybrid AG (Botan-ex) with limited success but during the frosty autumn/winter of 2006 they just vanished, only to be replaced with black scale!! It seems the sub zero temps killed them in the end.

Anthony Brown

Olive lace bug is obliterated by an organic spray Botan-Ex from Hybrid Ag in Wangaratta phone 0357227555 . I suggested to Peter Hill that he should use it on his lace bug infestation two years ago, at 200 to 1 in clean water. It was deadly. I use this spray now for scale etc.

Carl Engel

### Olive Lace Bug – David Carmichael

The Olive Lace Bug (OLB) is native to NSW and Qld, but currently has distributed widely in eastern Australia and lives in native eucalypts. Trees severely affected may fail to bear fruit the following year. The bug normally lays overwintering eggs in leaves during May to June and in spring these eggs hatch. The OLB can have numerous generations per year depending on the climate. Water stressed olive trees are very susceptible to attack by OLB. Irrigation management and mulching will help to maintain good soil moisture conditions. New infestations can occur regularly throughout the growing season. Eggs are usually laid in the brown sticky excretion on the underside of leaves and so are somewhat protected from insecticide sprays.

It is important to monitor the trees, starting from early spring for evidence of infestation and apply OLB treatment soon after OLB activity is first noticed. A follow up spray is generally required 10-14 days after the first application to kill the young nymphs that hatch from the eggs after the first spray was applied. Note that it important to spray upwards from under the foliage to ensure the insecticide reaches the

underside of the leaves. This is awkward to achieve. You should always check with product suppliers, but dimethoate, fenthion and potassium soap and some other natural pyrethrum products can be used to good effect on OLB and are registered for off-label use. But if not clear, always check with the supplier.

And so after the drought of recent years the conditions for infestation were ripe. Our trees got attacked badly and as we are organic we were distressed as to what we would do. From EE Muir we were recommended a product called Eco Oil. It is registered as an organic input. It cost around \$200.00 for a 20L container, and is mixed as a 1% solution (1 l/100 l of water). After discussions with the supplier we sprayed at the rate of 500 l per ha, or 2 l per tree. We have 3-6 year old trees and they are fairly small for their age as all our foliage got eaten off last year with the deer, so this amount was literally running off the leaves. The Eco Oil works purely by suffocation, it has no residual effects and so it is imperative to



get thorough wetting of the underside of the leaves. If the lace bugs are unhatched, or over 2mm in size then the spray has negligible effect. After trying several different ways of spraying ourselves we had to engage Ian Dwyer to spray with an air blast sprayer. This was done with the upper jets turned off and the lower ones pointing up and at a fairly low pressure. This had limited effect and after further discussions with Muirs and the supplier we were advised to use another product with the Eco Oil. This was Azamax with a price tag of

\$400 for 5 l. This is used in a 1% total solution, ie 0.9 l Eco Oil and 0.1 l Azamax per 100 l of water, so the Azamax goes a long way. The Azamax, which is also a registered organic input, has some insecticidal properties and this greatly improved the destruction of those little blighters. We sprayed at 2 weekly intervals and after the second application there was almost total kill.

There are some other water based applications that can be applied concurrently with the spray to reduce the spraying cost. For instance we concurrently sprayed a growth booster, again registered as an organic input, called Protomax. But always check for yourself with your supplier, or better still with the manufacturer. I have found they have technical staff who are most helpful in discussing the correct use of their products.

Hello Irene,

In regard to olive lace bug. I would be happy for you to forward my contact details to growers as I can assist them in the control of the pest.

It isn't just a matter of spraying them and hoping they will go away.

Ian Dwyer

Taggerty Property, Maintenance & Contracting ph 0421 404 452

**Further Reading:**

WA Department of Agriculture Farmnote No 82/2003

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## Chapter 2 - Journey to olive growing - Jill Mallamaci Myrtlevalle Olives Strathbogie

It's almost a year since we took over Myrtlevalle, (named after my mother ) without whose inheritance this would still be a dream. What an exciting year it's been! Never in my wildest dreams did I envisage I would complete an olive growing course, own a farm, sell it's produce, not make any money, - have little income – heaps of “outcome” lots of frustration and disheartened at times when plans went awry and the number of jobs not completed rose. Satisfaction when a task is completed.

Fertilizing 10 acres with a wheel barrow & buckets was definitely “ A Task”. “Do you have a forklift to unload the bags of fertilizer”? “Well no, a wheel barrow and some muscle” - Silence on the other end of the line! – That same kind gentleman unloaded & stacked nearly all the 80 bags, checked the trees, poked around in the soil then offered some advice and won my vote of confidence and patronage for future business with his company.

So armed with my trusty wheelbarrow and an icecream container I headed up to the grove totting 2 bags of fertilizer which I found too heavy to lug up the slope, so downgraded to 1 – Darn it - extra energy, time & effort. The grass was knee high & wet, so with fogged up glasses, mask, gloves and rain dripping into my boots (the mental picture doesn't even bear thinking about) I spent the day spreading the all needed fertilizer and thanked God for sending the rain to soak it in as I hadn't and still haven't mastered the irrigation system even following the simple instructions in the manual. That evening I came to the conclusion I couldn't wheel another barrow load up the hill . Day 2 - resort to plan “B” Wheel the barrow along a different route and bucket fertiliser over the fence. With arms dragging out of their sockets I trudged from tree to tree, the rain continued, I wished I was getting paid for time, effort and suffering. After 2/3 grove was done A MIRACLE ...My neighbour turned up in his tractor to slash the paddock so deposited bags up the hill and friends arrived with a 4WD, while the wife drove, her husband and I spread the remainder of the fertilizer....How lucky to have such good friends. I've always believed something nice always happens when you're feeling low.

Meantime I forgot to mention my partner was O.S. holidaying.....Typical.....

And so the seasons change, the flowers have come & gone, fruit set looks healthy if not a bit reduced after the somewhat heavy pruning Paul & I did. Robyn's alpacas have been reinstated to the grove after being banished for acquiring a taste for new leaves, their behavior to be monitored... Flying bugs found on 4 trees, sent to be identified and spray made up, sought greener pastures after the heavy rain so avoided being sprayed. Only a million + earwigs and some Redbacks to contend with in the shed. You'd think they'd know they're not welcome! This time next year this will be old hat and not much new to write about. At least I'm getting more equipment, the little old MANUAL 4WD my children surprised me with at Xmas, white with flower stickers on it, to tow the dilapidated old trailer, donated, (now rejuvenated, green, with a flat tyre to boot) Worst case scenario can only be to put it in the wrong gear and back it into the dam. Have a good harvest all!!!

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## Recipes for Fermenting, Pickling, Curing table olives

**Your wish is my command – below are some recipes, have fun!**

Hi Irene

My recipe for curing olives is tried and true after many attempts at various weird and wonderful processes. This one was given to me by Italians who have been using it for generations and it seems the simplest, most uncomplicated but not less time consuming method. Have been using this one now for 4 years and we sell our olives to numerous outlets across Melbourne and also at the Ghin Ghin Farmstore.

Firstly we use our Manzanillo olives from the grove which are not too ripe – firm and just going black. For the first week I rinse them with just water changing the water every day. This begins the leeching process. After the first week I then use a salt brine of 10% salt for each litre of water. This I change every week until the olives are ready. This may take up to 4 or 5 months depending on the seasons (the warmer the temperature the faster the process). I usually taste every now and then until there is no bitterness. Then one day all of a sudden they are ready – you'll know the minute you taste one. Rich and olivey with no bitterness. I then bottle them as needed in a weaker salt solution and cap them with some oil before sealing. Do not be put off by the scum that forms at the top of the drum – this is a natural part of the fermenting process. The Italians say this adds to their flavour! I have heard some people say that they threw their olives out because of this as they thought they had gone mouldy!

At first we would slice each olive which hastens the process but as our yield increased this was just not possible and also this allows bacteria to enter and make the olive soft and diseased looking. I use drums which have a tap at the bottom which makes changing the solution easier.

Best of luck – the process is not for those who are impatient but is very satisfying at the end.

Kind Regards,

**Scott Lawrance**

### **Olive Pickling – Maria Stavropoulos**

#### **Ingredients:**

2 kg olives slit and soaked (see steps 1 and 2)  
1.25 litres water  
3 tablespoons table salt, approximately  
600mls white vinegar  
12 tablespoons olive oil

#### **Method:**

You will need 4 good-sized glass jars, washed and sterilised with boiling water and one uncooked whole egg in its shell for testing salt levels in the water.

Slit the olives on both sides – a fine slit at the top of each side will do. (This will help release their bitter juice). You can also 'crack' them by pounding each one enough to split the flesh slightly.

Leave them to soak in salted water, changing the water each day, for a week.  
Wash and drain the olives and place them in the clean glass jars.

Fill a bowl with the water and add the salt. Float an egg in the bowl – when it is submerged to the point that only a 10c piece-sized circle of the egg's surface remains above the water, there is enough salt in the water.

Add the vinegar. Cover the olives in the jars with the salted water and vinegar mix and finish with a layer of olive oil to seal.

Set aside for about 3 to 4 weeks or until the olives are ready.

### Jos Weemaes' de-bittering olives recommendations

Deleted: Waemass'

Keep tubs full to overflowing - with a mat on top to ensure fruit is submerged

Remove rubber seal rings from lids, so that tubs can vent

Make sure no air is trapped under lid

Start with 8% (by mass 8 kg per 100 litres) salt solution; reduce PH to 5 by adding vinegar 0.5%; salt + low PH stop mould growth

Fermentation process maintains acidity; must avoid mould growth which raises PH

- Add 2% salt per week for 4 weeks to maintain salinity at minimum 7%
- Check with salinity meter - based on conductivity
- Clean scum off weekly
- Leave for a year to mature; critical test is for reduction of bitterness
- Bottle using boiling fresh brine - for green olives (5%)
- Bottle using boiling fermentation brine - for black olives - to emphasise blackness
- Expose finished black olives to air before adding brine darkens them
- Check all olives visually for quality before bottling; any not perfect go for tapenade
- Cover bottled olives in jar with good quality canola; olive oil goes cloudy or waxy in the fridge; the oil excludes oxygen.

Comments:

- No changes of water - so waste water disposal is limited
- Quicker process if temperature is higher
- Needs a salinity meter, but you could try the raw egg trick in Maria Stavropoulos' recipe above.

Below are links to websites with more recipes.

[http://www.oliveaustralia.com.au/Pickling\\_your\\_Olives/pickling\\_your\\_olives.html](http://www.oliveaustralia.com.au/Pickling_your_Olives/pickling_your_olives.html)

<http://www.hunterolives.asn.au/simplerecipes.htm>

### "Rivermist Organic Olive Grove" – Barbara and Carl Engel

Our grove is situated at the junction of the Goulburn River and the Eildon pondages. We have been NASAA certified from the start. The certification involved being "in conversion" for three years then finally fully certified. We do not irrigate the trees growing olives for oil.

Two items of interest which we have found important:

The first was pressing of oil. When we relied on another certified Organic Grove to press our fruit, there was the problem of having to pick fruit to suit the available press time. Naturally this meant picking fruit at various stages of ripeness. Last year we installed our own OLIOMIO 150 press. It allows us to press when the fruit was ready and not when the press is ready. There are various hidden costs involved. The

main is labour, and this not only involves the pressing but also the clean up. It takes up to three hour to thoroughly clean the unit, but we are pleased we purchased it.

The second was the operation of the bore we use for supplying water to the domestic fruit orchard, table olives and house gardens. Nobody told us when the bore was installed that there is a bacteria that feeds on iron compounds present in the bore water. The slower the bore pump is run, the warmer the pump and water became. (by warmer I mean a few degrees over cold). Hence the faster the bugs bred. Eventually the pump clogged up and burnt out the motor. A very expensive lesson was learnt. Now we have to add bore water treatment every one to two years. Local pump shops can advise on the purchase, application and source.

On an aside, we hand pick our olives and would welcome information as to the lightest and best hand held motorised rake for stripping the olives for oil. Nothing can beat the human hand for picking table olives.

[www.rivermist.com.au](http://www.rivermist.com.au)

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## A period of separation – will save you time, money and aggro!

We sent some soil off for analysis and were somewhat dismayed that we seemed to be going backwards at improving the health of our soil despite having what looks like a decent crop this year. The result of the analysis recommended that we should apply another 2.6 tonnes of lime p/ha but to wait for 6 months before applying much needed fertiliser. Lots of gnashing of teeth - How do we get lime and fertiliser applied if we have to wait for 6 months between the two when we don't irrigate, i.e. apply lime in March but then wait until September to apply fertiliser by which time the rain to wash the fertiliser in will be about to stop! So I spoke to Peter Brown at SWEP – he was sympathetic and convinced us that a period of separation is the way to go. The Lilydale lime went on last week 2.5 tonnes p/ha, 750 kgs of marine lime from Hybrid Ag will go around the drip-line of the trees next week and then we will wait, see how much rain we get this winter and we should be able to start to apply fertiliser sometime after July. We should also need less fertiliser as all of what we apply will be available for the trees and not evaporated.

Below is Peter Brown's response – I am obviously not the first to ask.

Hi Irene

Thanks for your question, it is one we get a lot.

There are three areas in which potentially negative effects can occur if lime (or dolomite) and fertiliser are applied too close together:

1. Urea and ammonium fertilisers exposed to high pH levels tend to release their Nitrogen as Ammonia gas, which is then unavailable for plants (although grass leaves nearby may be able to absorb some of it).
2. Phosphate can combine with the Calcium in lime to form highly insoluble tri-calcium phosphate, again severely reducing the plant availability of that nutrient.
3. The chemistry is a bit more complex, but many of the trace elements are also rendered unavailable for plant uptake in the presence of high pH &/or calcium.

The bottom line is that lime and dolomite need time to improve the soil in ways which increase the availability of nutrients and biological activity. The problem with nutrients is that they are often needed at very specific times. If you apply fertiliser too soon, the changes in the soil may eventually get them to the

plants, but not at the time your plants need them.

The Guidelines for Managing Plant Nutrients below is only a draft, so if any of it sounds a bit strange, please let me know and I will try and clarify it for you.

Cheers  
Peter Brown BSc Dip Hort Sc  
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SWEP Analytical Laboratories  
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## Guidelines for Managing Plant Nutrients in the Soil

A frequent comment about nutrient recommendations from SWEP (we do not recommend specific fertiliser products) is that there doesn't seem to be enough to allow for things like nutrient lock-up or other 'modifying factors'.

This is quite true, but the reason is that our recommendations are based on what is required once the work to minimise (or eliminate) the effects of these modifying factors has been done. So, for best results, it is important to apply our recommendations according to the principles of the Mikhail System. This treats soil as a 'Living System' in which all aspects need to be managed together as an integrated process.

Unfortunately, many farmers have been led to believe that soil tests are only about fertiliser and so they do not send in samples until they are ready to call their contractor and put in an order. Using our nutrient recommendations at this time (either alone or in combination with the Lime and Gypsum), will not give the best result.

***An important requirement of the Mikhail System is that Lime, Dolomite and Gypsum need at least six months (more if rainfall is low) to produce their effects on the soil, so that optimum fertiliser efficacy can be assured.***

These notes explain the basis for SWEP nutrient recommendations, how nutrients can be more effectively managed during the season and what you can do to get as good a result as possible if you need to start with a 'fertiliser first' approach.

### **Soil has needs of its own**

Even with no production – just to maintain essential plant cover and microbial activity – soil has a need for nutrients. How much of each nutrient is needed will depend on the CEC (or the capacity of the soil to provide nutrients in plant-available form).

The first step in preparing nutrient recommendations must, therefore, be to look at the levels of available nutrients on a soil test report and make a provision for any that are below this essential 'base fertility' level.

This principle applies to all living systems – not just soil. For instance, each of us requires a certain calorie intake just to stay alive – before we even begin to work out what is needed to support our particular activity level. If we do not make any allowance for this, we will find ourselves unable to meet the goals or objectives we would like in sport, work or family life. We see the same thing in our crops when, even in good seasons, they fail to meet our expectations.

### **Plant requirements for a single season**

Every plant has its own requirement for various nutrients and every soil has its own capacity for providing these nutrients – the two cannot be separated! What is more, the needs of a crop will vary throughout its life. For much the same reason that you do not expect a newborn baby to eat a three-course steak dinner (much less the its complete food requirement for a lifetime), newly emergent seedlings and shoots should not be expected to properly utilise an entire season’s nutrient requirement all at once.

Of course, the soil is an important factor here. Light, sandy soils have only a small capacity to hold nutrients in plant-available form, so smaller repeated applications would be essential. On the other hand, a strongly structured, well-prepared clay soil can have a large capacity to hold and supply plant nutrients over an extended period.

For these reasons, heavier soils (given adequate preparation) will be suited to crops for which changes in requirement over the season are small and/or repeated applications are impractical – due to limited equipment access, etc.). Conversely, sandy soils are best for irrigated crops with special nutrient needs at certain critical stages.

A soil test can give you the overall nutrients required for a given crop on a particular soil, but you may still need some help working out how and when to best apply those nutrients. The advice of an agronomist with experience on the crop in question and how it performs in your region will be essential to getting close to the optimal ‘*crop potential*’ for the season.

### **Responses limited by soil balance relationships**

So why is it many growers find simply applying more fertiliser fails to deliver improved results?

The short answer is that while they may be achieving optimal crop potential, they are nevertheless operating at less than their maximum ‘*soil potential*’. In fact, it has been estimated that even many of the best farmers today are only working on 30% to 40% of their true soil potential.

However, the first step should be the application of any required Lime, Dolomite or Gypsum (for soil structure and function). The application of fertiliser should be the second step, done six months later. You can get more information about this from our Fact Sheet on the 5 steps to soil health. To summarise however, the important steps to improve any soil are:

- 1. Soil test to identify the problem**
- 2. Adjust the Cation Balance first (usually in Autumn)**
- 3. Apply fertiliser six months later**
- 4. Stimulate soil biology after every disturbance**
- 5. Monitor and Adjust**

An important aspect of this method is that it leads to progressively reduced inputs, until only small maintenance applications of fertiliser are required each season for both sustainable and cost-effective production. This contrasts with the vicious cycle of applying more fertiliser to increase productivity, but then needing even more productivity to cover the increased cost – requiring still further increases in fertiliser application rates – and so on.

### **If you must use a ‘Fertiliser First’ approach**

Since you will be applying controlled amounts of whatever nutrients are actually needed – rather than just more and more of the same old NPK – you can expect to get a satisfactory result from SWEP nutrient recommendation (all other factors aside). However, getting the *most* from your soil potential will

mean waiting until you can apply any required Lime, Dolomite &/or Gypsum and giving these adequate time to take effect with improved cation balance, soil structure and friability.

During the current season, while you are waiting to do this, but still needing to maintain production, there are a few things you can do to get the best possible response from your fertiliser:

1. You could try supplementing the nutrient recommendations on your soil test report with a little extra Phosphorus.
2. If the soil pH (measured in water) is less than 5.7, apply the trace elements (and extra P if you can) as a foliar spray, but consult your local Agronomist or SWEP agent about the best timing for this.
3. If your soil pH (in water) is above 8.0 foliar applications of trace elements will be essential.
4. If your recommendations include a high Nitrogen requirement, consider splitting this into two or three applications at critical crop stages. Again, your Agronomist or SWEP agent can help you with this, but please let us know if we can be of any assistance as well.
5. Don't overlook the Sulphur. Using low analysis phosphate and the sulphate forms of other fertilisers will usually be enough to meet any requirement you have for this nutrient.

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Further Reading:

**SWEP Fact Sheet #6:** "How do I turn Nutrients into Fertiliser?"

**SWEP Fact Sheet #12:** "Only 5 steps lead to soil health"

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•Transport    \$1.25/km for 6t truck - one way

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