

Olives New Zealand BMP – Skin Colour

Skin Colour by Sandy Lang and Edwin Pitts

We have already commented that skin colour is just one of the fruit attributes that change during ripening. Also, skin colour is probably the fruit attribute in which we have the *least* real interest – much more important to us are the *amount* of oil in the fruit and the *quality* of that oil. While, in principle any of these other changing attributes could be used to assess crop maturity, it is because skin colour is the one most easily and cheaply monitored that we use it.

Colour change: Now, it is a property of skin colour that prior to the onset of ripening, very little colour change is perceptible at all – all the fruit have been uniformly green for months. The same is true towards the end of ripening when, again, little perceptible change in skin colour occurs – all the fruit are a uniform shade of 'black' (most cultivars) whether they have just come to ripeness or whether they are very overripe indeed.

It follows that a crop maturity assessment based on skin colour is *least* sensitive at the extremes (very unripe or very overripe fruit) and *most* sensitive during the period when most fruit are in colour transition. Conveniently, this roughly 2-week period is just the fruit maturity stage at which we wish to harvest. **This makes skin colour an excellent indicator of harvest readiness - it is also quick and cheap!**