

Pickling Fresh Olives

Harvest the olives very carefully to avoid bruising them and begin the process as soon as possible. Sort them according to size and degree of ripeness. Discard any fruit that is not perfect.

Place the olives to soak in water, there should be no contact with air; keep them submerged by placing a plate or saucer on top. Change the water daily for between about 10 and 20 days depending on the ripeness of the fruit. Rinse the olives well before placing them in clean water.

Taste to assess the level of bitterness every two days after the first 10 days. Continue the soaking process until the olives are leached sufficiently for your taste.

Prepare a 10% brine solution (100g common salt to 1L water) or a salt / acid solution (60g common salt, 200mL white wine vinegar and 800mL water which is preferable as having a low pH is a sensible precaution when preserving non-acid foods). Bring to the boil, cover and leave to cool.

Sterilise clean jars and self-sealing lids. Jars can be covered with water, brought to the boil and boiled for 10 minutes or placed in a preheated oven, 140C for 20 minutes. Cover the lids with boiling water and leave for 5 minutes.

Rinse the olives and pack into the jars. Pour in the cooled brine to within 15mm of the top, then fill to the top with olive oil (check that it is not rancid). Seal the jars with the lids.

Leave for about 4 - 6 weeks before eating. Once opened, store the olives in the refrigerator. If they are too salty, soak in water in a covered container in the refrigerator for a day before eating.

Flavoured Olives

After the initial 4 – 6 weeks in the brine the olives can be flavoured. Red or white wine vinegar with sugar, garlic or herbs, or a combination, are common.

Bring 50g common salt, 1 litre water, 1 tablespoon sugar and 200mL vinegar (red or white wine) to the boil, stirring to dissolve the salt and sugar. Cover and cool.

Drain the olives and place in sterilised jars, layering with garlic cloves, rosemary, thyme, bay leaves, chilli slices or thinly pared lemon rind if you wish – don't be too generous, as the flavour will overpower the olives.

Pour in the brine to within 15mm of the top, then fill to the top with olive oil. Seal the jars with the lids. Leave for a few days before eating. Once opened, store the olives in the refrigerator. The other jars should keep in a cool dark place for 6 – 9 months.

A recipe when you want flavoured olives in a hurry! This works well with commercially prepared olives too.