

PICKLING OLIVES

Place the olives on a clean stone surface or cutting board and bruise them with another stone or hammer. Alternatively prick several times with a fork, or make three slits in the skin of each olive with a small serrated knife while turning the fruit between the thumb and index finger. This bruising, pricking or cutting will allow the water and salt to penetrate the fruit thereby drawing out the bitterness and also preserving it. This will also do away with the need to use a caustic soda solution as used in commercial processing of olives.

Toss them immediately into a bucket of clean water in which one half cup of coarse or cooking salt has been dissolved into every ten cups of water. A clean plate can be placed on top to keep the olives submerged. All olives must be under the liquid. Pour the liquid away each day and replace with fresh salt water. Repeat this washing process for about 12 days for green olives and about 10 days for black (ripe) olives. The best test is to bite an olive. When the bitterness has nearly gone, the olives are ready for the final salting. As you can see, this simple recipe involves the disposal of salty rinse water into the environment. If you decide to commercially pickle olives, there are other recipes that require a longer pickling time but do not result in salty waste water.

Pour off and measure the last lot of water so you will know the volume of salt brine that will be required. Measure that quantity of fresh, warm water into a pan and dissolve the salt, this time at the rate of 1 cup of salt to 10 cups of water. Bring the salt water preserving mixture to the boil and allow cooling. Place olives in bottles and then pour the salt water brine over them until the fruit is completely submerged. Top up the bottles with up to one centimetre of olive oil to stop air getting to the fruit and seal the lids on. No further preparation is required and the bottled olives will store for at least 12 months in a cool cupboard.

You may find a white film appears on the surface of the brine as a result of the fermentation. Skim or rinse it off.

When you are ready eat your olives, pour out the strong preserving solution and fill the jar with clean, cool water. Leave in the refrigerator for 24 hours and taste them. If they are still too salty for your liking, then refill the bottle with a fresh lot of water and return to the refrigerator for a further 24 hours. (The plain water leaches some of the salt back out of the olives).

At this stage you can also add any or all of the following flavourings: Grated garlic, basil, oregano, chopped onion, red capsicum, lemon juice and lemon pieces. Especially popular is a combination of garlic, basil and lemon juice.

