



Informationen zur Umwelt und für Naturreisende auf Kreta:
Information about the Environment and for travellers in Crete:



The “liquid gold” of Crete:
Olive oil (nectar of gods)

The olive tree and its products accompany and shape the culture of the peoples around the Mediterranean since more than 6000 years, from antiquity until today. The true olive tree (*Olea europaea*) and its fruits (besides cereals and wine) belong to the oldest food of civilization. ATHENA, the goddess of the olive is also the goddess of wisdom. ARISTOTLE philosophized about the tree and PLATO appreciated olives more than any other food. In Crete are based on recent surveys over 20 million olive trees whose fruit are processed in over 5000 Mills (estimated). Crete produces almost 40% of total Greek olive oil production. When the wind turns the small leaves of the olive trees, "silvery waves" run from the coast up in the 800 m high promontory. One (1) Litre olive oil takes approximately 4-6 kg olives. The olive harvest begins after the 21st of November and lasts until the end of February.



Since Heracles today no longer (as he did, according to legend, in the ancient Hellas) comes to Earth and conjure an olive tree from the Earth with his stick, people in Crete need to maintain their olive plantations (fig. links.) themselves: subsoil, water, fertilise and crop. Olive trees can be very old and wear first fruits from the 7th year (picture right). The different colour of olives shows the maturity; green olives are immature, the black are ready for harvesting. The average harvest is at olive 40 kilograms per tree

Pictures: H. Eikamp (12/2004)



The olives trees on Crete are still harvested as thousands of years ago – in particular by hand, although today smaller technical devices coming to use. This is a good thing, because the best and highest quality olive oil is and remains that of hand-picked olives. The picking is toil and time consuming work and fewer and fewer young people are ready to follow in the footsteps of their parents and grandparents and to continue this old tradition in Crete.

Pictures: U. Kluge (12/2004)



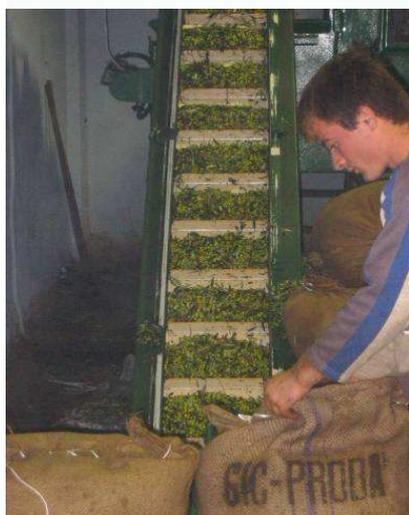
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Two (2) olive mills in Gouves, approx 11 miles north-east of Iraklion. The picture left is showing a “modern” olive mill and right one from “the old days” with the so-called “cake” (the residues during pressing) are stored directly to the mill. Today it serves as a fertilizer, animal feed or fuel. The technical methods of the production of olive oil of course have changed over the centuries. However, the high quality remained the same. Cretan olive oil is always cold pressed, clean and without any additives.



Not much has changed in the process of oil production, only the devices are different today: the heavy mill-stones are today no longer operated by hand or donkeys, but electrically and the press takes place hydraulically. The olives are first freed from the foliage and washed (see upper series), to then be guided to a so-called “endless central pillar”. The fruits are then squashed to a tough paste which is then pressed. During the pressing accrues an emulsion of oil and amniotic fluid, whose components are separated in a centrifuge (see lower series).



Pictures: H. Eikamp

In Crete, people cover approx. 42% of their calorie intake by fat, almost exclusively olive oil; however, there is the lowest rate of cardiovascular disease in European comparison. Olive oil has the ideal combination in fatty acids, to keep cholesterol levels in check; the unsaturated fatty acids reduce the content of harmful LDL cholesterol and save the good HDL cholesterol. Cretan olive oil is not only food; it is also a universal medicine.