

OREGON OLIVE TREES

It's a most unusual nursery

By GAIL OBERST
For the Capital Press

DALLAS, Ore. — Big ideas can grow on small nurseries.

Bryan Brown and Barbara Porter's Oregon Olive Trees, situated on less than 20 acres, is home to two unique crops: cold-tolerant olive trees and genetically improved Christmas tree seed.

The husband and wife team now own the farm where Bryan's dad, Ken Brown, a retired Oregon State University Extension agent, 25 years ago began developing Christmas trees for seed, operating as Westwinds Farm. One of those trees, a Nordmann species, in 2021 was donated as the

official Christmas tree for the OSU College of Forestry.

About six acres of Barbara and Bryan's farm still feature the seed trees developed by Ken, but most of that seed crop has been purchased by a local conifer tree nursery. Bryan said that when his dad left the farm two years ago, he and Barbara decided to try something new.

"We decided on a new path," Bryan said.

That new path is lined with olive trees. Bryan, who'd hung around extension agents all his life, had picked up a flyer from Javier Fernandez-Salvador, who headed up the OSU's Olea project and established the Oregon Olive Growers Association. Fernandez-Sal-

vador now leads a similar project through the University of California-Davis.

The Olea project aims to determine which cultivars are best-suited to Oregon's climates, enlisting growers and spreading the word about local olive products. Although the association was left without staff, the couple are determined to continue the experiment on their own.

Growers in Oregon have been slowed by drought and the pandemic — today there are about a dozen significant growers on less than 1,000 acres statewide.

But Brown is hopeful.

"This is the future. It's happening," he said of olive trees.

The small farm at the east

end of the Van Duzer Corridor has soils and climates typical of the Willamette Valley. Beginning in 2018, the couple began planting olive trees in their demonstration orchard. Today, the orchard has 30 cultivars — a handful of the approximately 1,000 types that grow worldwide. Oregon Olive's trees have survived cold and heat — the survivors dictate which species the couple will sell to Oregon buyers.

In 2019, the couple built a greenhouse to focus on growing small cold-tolerant olive plants.

While most of the other olive tree growers aim to harvest for fruit and oil, Barbara and Bryan's operation grows trees to sell.

Some customers purchase enough trees to produce olives and oil. The production goal in an average year is about 20 pounds per a mature tree. Many more buyers have sentimental or aesthetic reasons to plant. Oregon homeowners and landscapers have recently discovered the beauty and durability of the evergreen olive trees.



Gail Oberst/For the Capital Press

Barbara Porter and Bryan Brown are experimenting with olive trees suitable for growing in the Northwest. They sell the trees from their nursery near Dallas, Ore.

Locals who have moved here from southern climes love the olive trees for the memories of home the plant recalls.

Many Oregon wineries are planting olive orchards, and processing the fruit to serve to their visitors.

A trip to the Oregon Olive Trees orchard — appointments recommended — will include a tour and information about trees suitable for specific growing conditions. To see the selection of trees, visit <https://oregonolivetree.com/>

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