



Olive Oil

BE A PART OF CALIFORNIA OLIVE OIL HISTORY

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FATHER JUNIPERO SERRA, A FRANCISCAN, was chosen by the government of King Carlos III of Spain to be the leading emissary in the 1769 expedition to establish Missions throughout California. He established the Mission San Diego de Alcalá that same year and orchards and vegetable gardens were cultivated along with olive trees. The first pressing of olive oil at this Mission was purported to be in 1803, and its uses were for sacramental ceremonies, lamp oil, cooking, healing wounds and lubricating machinery. As the Missions were built throughout California, olive trees became an important part of the secular and religious lives of the inhabitants.

The olive cuttings, believed to be Spanish in origin, were dubbed Mission Olive and it has now been established that this variety is unique to Mexico and California. Tests at the University of Spain at Cordoba were not able to verify the Mission Olive's genus to any of the 700 existing varieties worldwide. Today these ancient olive trees are being revitalized by a volunteer group named Mission Olive Preservation Restoration & Education Project (MOPREP). This group's goals are to restore the health of existing olive trees, harvest and mill the olives as well as propagate cuttings from authentic original groves. Their aim is also to educate communities throughout the State on the historic significance of these 200 year old plantings and to raise funds through the sale of olive oil, tree seedlings, sponsorships and grants. To become a volunteer, email info@moprep.org or call 916.966.9853. For more information on Mission Olive Preservation Restoration & Education Project please visit www.moprep.org.

Calolea

IN 1997 MICHAEL KELLER WAS READY FOR A CHANGE, but didn't know, yet, what might come next. While living on a small family plot in Sonoma County; he and his fiancée, Monica, pressed their first oil with olives harvested from the abandoned trees of their neighbors. It was love at first taste. Michael's new passion became a career much sooner than he imagined.

In 1999 he and Monica were looking for a place to settle down and stumbled upon a 10-acre piece of land northeast of Sacramento. This new property was covered in 100-year old olive trees that hadn't been tended since the 1960's. Armed with a mower and pruning shears; the ambitious Kellers moved in, cleared the brush and blackberries, and brought the trees back to life. That first year they produced just 80 gallons of oil—selling at Farmer's Markets and a few local stores. Californians were hungry for quality oil. The company snowballed, and Calolea Olive Oil was born.

"We have increased our business almost 100% every year," Monica commented. "The elevation, rocky soils and hot dry summers of the Sierra foothills are perfect for growing olives. The quality is world class and starting to get attention from retailers around the world interested in California oils."

For three consecutive years, Calolea received one of the top awards at "Olive Oils of the World", the prestigious international competition held at the Los Angeles County fair. Last year Calolea also received an award for one of the "Top 35 Olive Oils of the World" by Der Feinschmecker magazine in Cologne, Germany. In 2008 they won their highest award yet—"Best of Show" Extra Virgin Olive Oil—Domestic—Robust/Mission, Early Harvest, Yuba County from the Los Angeles International Olive Oil competition.

The next step for the industrious Kellers? They plan to build a tasting room in a newly acquired orchard in the nearby town of Bangor.

Patti Bess is a freelance writer and cookbook author from Grass Valley, California. She also hosts a monthly radio show called What's Cookin' on KVMR—FM.

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