



PORTION 36 OLIVE ORCHARD'S

# **KALAMATA GUIDE**

**FOR HOME PICKLERS**

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Portion 36 Olive Orchard is situated in Devonvale, Stellenbosch and consists of 1 600 trees of 8 different cultivars.

We grow wonderful Kalamata olives and every year during harvest we invite the public to come and pick their own.

We have an informal network, Portion 36 Kalamata Club, consisting of people that buy Kalamatas from us to pickle themselves.

We exchange ideas, recipes and meet to taste each others' olives. The idea is to learn and become inspired – and most of all, to ENJOY Kalamata olives.

Often people ask us for advice and recipes, especially if it is the first time they pickle olives. Together with the Kalamata Club we have therefore collected our experiences and recipes in this little guide. We hope it will be useful to you.

Please also share your experiences and ideas with us – pickling Kalamata olives is a creative and rewarding journey.

*Arend and Birgitta Hofmeier*



## PICKING KALAMATA OLIVES

The Kalamata olive for pickling is normally picked ripe, when the colour is deep purple or black without any green shades. It should still be firm but not hard. Crucial for curing is the size of the olive – it doesn't matter if it is small or big (although of course the big ones are very impressive) but olives cured together should be of similar size. It is a great advantage to pick yourself since you can ensure the uniformity of the olives.

...FRESH...FRESH...FRESH.. is the secret...

At Portion 36 we also sell fresh olives that are already picked. Because the freshness is very important for the end result, we only take orders and pick the olives the same morning or at the latest, in the afternoon the day before, they are delivered. An olive left standing, especially in warmer temperatures, will start oxidising – basically the first step of a rotting process. So it is important to take your olives straight home and start the next step in the process – the curing.

# AN OLIVE CANNOT BE EATEN RAW!

## ... EXCEPT THE GREEK THROUBE OLIVE

A raw olive is terribly bitter even when it is fully ripe - it tastes as awful as the cured olive tastes delicious. Olives simply cannot be eaten without processing. But, there is of course one exception, the Greek Throube olive. They ripen and shrivel on the tree and fall off when fully ripe. Throube olives can be eaten without processing but are normally dry cured (in coarse salt). They have a meaty, strong olive taste similar to Portion 36 Dry Cured Olives.

## OLEUROPEIN = BITTERNESS



# KALAMATA

A fresh, ripe olive is very bitter, a taste it derives from a substance called oleuropein in the olive. But there are more reasons why we cure the olives.

### 1. BITTERNESS - OUT

We want to break down the oleuropein, leach it out and reduce the olive's bitterness.

### 2. MAKE NATURAL PRESERVATIVES

We want to create lactic acid, which is a natural preservative and,

### 3. FERMENTING FLAVOURS - IN

We want to create fermentation products in the olive that give rich flavours.

Here is a check-list you can use during the curing process to find out when your olives are ready.

- Has the olive lost its bitterness?
- Can you taste the lactic acid?
- Has the olive developed some fruity flavours?

But you haven't even started CURING yet so it is high time to do so. Remember FRESH - your olives must not wait.

# CURING KALAMATA OLIVES

There are many methods to cure olives and there is no right or wrong. It is a matter of taste, time and to some extent the volume. In this guide we will tell you how we at Portion 36 prepare our olives.

We have decided to use a method that suits us and that is a result of years of experimenting - with different methods and olive cultivars. Many of our Kalamata club members make their olives with different methods and their olives are equally fantastic.

Before the actual curing starts the olives should be rinsed thoroughly. They are full of dust and sand from the southeaster blowing dry soil around in the orchard. We normally leave the olives in buckets of water overnight and then rinse them off in running water.

# CURING IN SALT BRINE

**CURING = FERMENTATION**

**NATURE REMOVES SOME THINGS  
- AND ADD OTHERS**

**CURING - FOR TASTE AND SAFETY**

**...PATIENCE - PATIENCE  
-  
PATIENCE...**

At Portion 36 we cure our Kalamatas in salt brine and we do not cut or prick our Kalamatas. It makes the curing process take longer but we don't mind - we think the result is worth the wait.

The curing of the olive is a fermentation process, during which some substances are broken down and others formed. There are a lot of chemical processes involved but basically the bitterness goes out of the olive and into the olive go substances that preserve and protect the olive so it lasts long and is safe to eat. The fantastic part is that bad tasting particles disappear and good particles are created and go into the olive - all in a natural process!

At Portion 36 we normally cure our Kalamata olives in 10% salt brine. After rinsing we put the olives in drums - you can use any plastic container but not metal since salt corrodes metal. **The olives must be completely submerged, and there should preferably be no air in the drum.** We fill the drums to the



brim so that when we put the lids on they overflow. If any part of the olive is in contact with air it will oxidise. During the fermentation gas is produced and you need to open your lid every now and then, at least once a month (or make a small hole in the lid). You also need to circulate the brine but be careful with the olives, you don't want to bruise them.

We believe that this curing method is both efficient and produces the most flavourful olives.

**10% SALT BRINE**  
**= 100G SALT TO 900G WATER**

**TEMPERATURE:** Because the curing is a fermentation process you do not want to put the olives in too cold a place, like in the fridge. Anywhere in the range 15-25°C is fine.

**TIPS:** Put your olives in orange net bags, they come in rolls that you can buy at any shop that sells plastic goods like Plastic Warehouse for instance. Then the olives are easy to handle and submerge in the brine.



## CURING - CHALLENGES

Because the olives are cured in a strong salt solution, it can be difficult to taste the flavours and how debittered the olive is. One has to allow for some saltiness when tasting. When the olives are bottled later the salt is extracted to a large extent. (You can also leave them in fresh water overnight before bottling to extract some of the salt.)

From there on you need not do much but wait – unless you are impatient. Depending on volume, if you do nothing, this process can take 12 months. But you can also change the brine after a few weeks to speed up the process. You just pour off the brine and make a new identical solution to replace it.

We recommend that you do not do this too often, you do not want to create too much salt waste and it also affects the flavour of the end product.

If you change the brine the process will be faster but the brine you pour off contains fermenting substances that you want the olives to absorb since they add flavours and you will lose those in the process. But experiment - make a few smaller containers and you can leave some untouched whilst you speed up the fermentation in some by changing the brine.

# DON'T PANIC WHEN...

... your beautiful black Kalamatas lose their colour in the brine and become all shades of brown, maroon, beige... this is natural. If you want your olives darker again you can just expose them to air for up to 24 hours before bottling them. Put the olives in a bottle and wait some hours before pouring the brine.

... there is a white film or mould on the surface of your brine. It is due to the presence of air in the drum. To avoid it make sure there is no air on top of the brine.

... when you tasted so many olives and it's been so many weeks – and they are still bitter. Hang in there. Change the brine and we promise, it will de-bitter sooner or later. The time it takes depends on the size and ripeness of the olive, and of course your personal preference.

**TO CUT...**

Many people cut or prick their olives before curing. This is to make the bitter oleuropein leak out easier. We prefer not to do this, and it is not only because it is

**A LOT OF WORK...**

It is our experience that although the cut may serve well to extract the bitterness, it leaves the olive flesh around the cut exposed. It will naturally be able to absorb more liquid (water and later often vinegar used for preservation). Our cut olives have more quickly become soft and kept the flavours for shorter period of time than uncut olives. But again - it is a tradeoff. Maybe if you want your olives debittered quickly and intend to eat them very fast, this is a method that works well for you. This is often the case in home pickling and you will find that many of our recipes cure the olives rather fast. In the end it is up to you, dear Kalamata lover, - to cut or not to cut - that is the question...

**...OR  
NOT  
TO CUT...**

## OTHER CURING PROCESSES

It is also possible to cure an olive in fresh water. It is a much more labour and water intensive method, you need time and lots of water (unless you put it in a bag in toilet cistern - good for small quantities). Many of the recipes in this guide recommend water curing. How often and for how long varies and we guess it is really up to yourself to taste and make a judgement to when your olives are de-bittered enough. Industrially lye is often used for debittering olives since it is a very fast method.

*Fresh Water... Lye solution ...*

*Dry curing in Coarse Salt...*

At Portion 36 we also dry cure olives; the olives are packed in coarse plain salt in a drum with a drainage at the bottom and left for 4-6 weeks. They become slightly salty and wrinkled, just like dried fruit with intense olive flavour.



# BOTTLING KALAMATA OLIVES

Finally, the day comes and once you decide your Kalamatas have de-bittered it is time to bottle them and this is now the fun part and where you can create your own, unique table olives. There are a thousand ways, but just a few basics.



First of all, we remove the olives from the strong salt brine and leave them in fresh water overnight. This especially applies when you have cured in a 10% salt brine as we do. The next day we take the olives out and put them in bottles that have been sterilized. We have found that the darker olives in the brine are often more debittered than the lighter. If you have time and energy it may be worthwhile to remove the dark ones first and leave the lighter for a bit longer until they are equally debittered. That way all of your olives will be perfect.

## BRINE FOR BOTTLING

**TIP:** You can sterilize your bottles in the dishwasher – or in the microwave.

Then you need to make a brine and the question is what to bottle in – water, salt, vinegar, oil... We bottle our olives in weak salt brine, around 3%. You will see in the recipes that there are many other combinations.

**FLOATING EGG:** We have learned that many olive picklers decide how strong salt brine they use by putting an egg in the brine and add salt until it floats. This rather charming method is based on the fact that salt water has higher density than fresh water. (The Dead Sea is 33% salt and you float like a cork). The salt percentage you achieve by this method is not totally accurate but good enough.

We recommend that you mix the brine by weighing salt and water. 30 g salt to 970 g



water for example if you want a 3% salt solution.

We do not use vinegar or any other preservatives. An olive that is fully fermented has a natural preservative - lactic acid - and does not really need any other preservative.


**Challenge:** This method makes a rather fresh product and you need to think for how long you want to be able to keep your olives. Theoretically olives can be kept for up to 4 years. We think that our Kalamatas should be consumed between the harvests.

It is our experience that our olives will keep for a year in the fridge unopened in the weak salt brine, but they lose some of their flavour. If bottled in vinegar on the other hand, the olives will with time absorb more and more of the vinegar and we find that they can become very acidic and taste more vinegar than olive. If you want to bottle with vinegar you can choose a lighter or heavier solution - anything up to 50% can be used.

With a strong vinegar the olives clearly will preserve longer but the trade off is a more acidic olive.

## NATURAL PRESERVATIVES





WHAT TYPE OF VINEGAR TO USE: In the Kalamata Club we have tasted olives made both from Brown Grape Vinegar and White Spirit Vinegar and both work. It is of course preferable to use a good quality vinegar – this is after all a delicacy you are producing and no effort must be spared!

FLAVOURING OLIVES: It is very common to flavour olives. Herbs, spices, olive oil, chilli, lemon zest, lemon juice, wine, juniper berries, blueberries – whatever you like. When you flavour olives – leave the herb or garlic or chilli in the bottle only for as long as it takes to make the olive taste the way you want it. Then take it out, or it will risk taking over the olive flavour. 1-2 weeks is normally enough. Kalamata olives are seldom stuffed - something you often find with olive cultivars that are picked while they are still green such as Nocellara and Manzanilla.

Portion 36's pickling is somewhat boring in that we do not add anything to our olives. We like to offer people olives that taste of olives, especially the Kalamata which has a natural mild flavour and a firm flesh. Also, anyone who wants to experiment and marry the Kalamata with other favourite flavours can do so. We love garlic and sometimes we will stick a clove of garlic or two in a bottle for a week and then take it out.

Enough also of basics, now it is time for some of the recipes.

# PORTION 36 KALAMATA CLUB RECIPES

*TIP: Put olives in orange bags!*

## BROWN GRAPE VINEGAR OLIVES

5 kg Kalamata olives

Put in cold water and change water every day for 3 weeks. Make sure olives are submerged.

Make a salt brine - determine strength by putting an egg in the water and add salt until the egg floats.

Leave olives in this salt brine for 1 week. Take olives out and rinse in cold water.

Prepare a brine of : 4,5 l water, 300 g salt, 250 ml brown grape vinegar.

Put olives in glas jars (leave olives exposed to air for a few hours if you want them to go darker.)

Add garlic, chillies and herbs of choice.

Puur the brine over the olives until they are covered. Puur some olive oil on top to cover. Seal with tight lid and keep in a cool place. Ready to eat after a few weeks!

*TIP: Sterilise glass jars in dishwasher.*

## MUSTARD KALAMATAS

11 kg Kalamata olives

Put olives in buckets of water and change every day for 21 days.

Make a 10% salt brine and put the olives in the salt solution for 2-3 days. Make sure the olives are submerged. Taste the olives often, do not hesitate if you want to add more salt.

Prepare a brine of 1,5 liter water + 1,5 liter naturally fermented 5% grape vinegar.

Add: 1 tsp Prepared Pommery, Dijon or Wholegrain Mustard

1 tsp ground black pepper (from mill)

200 – 300 ml Brown Sugar

Bring to a boil and let cool, taste and add sugar to your taste.

Sterilise glass jars in dishwasher and pack the olives in the jars.

Cover with the hot liquid, seal with olive oil.

Seal lids tightly.

Keep in cool, dark place for 5 weeks. Then and onward – READY TO EAT!

## OLIVES THAT KEEP YOU OCCUPIED

Rinse the Kalamata Olives in clean cold water.

Sit in front of the TV and make a cut in each olive.

Put the cut olives in a bucket and pour water over and cover with a lid.

Change the water once a day for a month.

Make a brine of 4 L water, 1,5 cup fine salt, 4 cups vinegar and pour over the olives.

Leave for a week in the bucket and taste until you like the taste of your olives.

It should take between 4 and 10 days.

When you decide your olives are perfect to your taste, pour the brine off and put the olives  
in glass bottles.

Flavour your olives with herbs or spices that you like such as  
chillies, basil, rosemary, black pepper corns, thyme, garlic and red wine.

Combinations work well too.

## ROSEMARY AND LEMON KALAMATAS

Rinse the Kalamatas olives in clean, cold water.

Put them in buckets.

Make a brine of 10 percent salt - 100 g salt to 900 g water.

Pour the brine over the olives and make sure they are submerged.

Put a lid on but not airtight -

Leave in brine for 6 weeks. Change the brine for a new 10 percent salt solution.

Leave for another 6 weeks.

Taste the olives and if you think they are still bitter, change the brine again and leave until you are happy.

When the Kalamatas are to your taste, take them out and put them in glass bottles.

Add fresh rosemary and lemon slices to the bottle

Make a new brine, 8 percent salt and pour over the olives. Seal with some olive oil and tighten the lids. Keel in a cool place.

## KALAMATAS IN ROSEMARY AND VINEGAR

Soak the olives in water for 2 weeks. Change the water every day.

Make a 5 percent salt brine and put the olives in the brine for 4 weeks.

Remember to taste the olives before you take them out - you decide when they are perfect. If after 4 weeks they are still bitter, leave them longer or even replace the brine with new brine.

When the olives are ready, make a brine for the bottling:

1 l vinegar of choice, 4 l water and 200 g salt.

Put the olives in bottles, add rosemary twigs and pour the brine over the olives.

Leave for 4 weeks.

## KALAMATAS A LA DIE BURGER

Inspect your olives and ensure they are ripe but not soft.

Put olives in orange bags and place in buckets. Cover with fresh water - change the water every day.

Make a brine 20 percent salt and submerge the olives in the salt brine. Put in a cool place.

Change the brine every week for four weeks. Taste the olives to see that they are not too bitter. Sterilise bottles (can be done in dishwasher or microwave). Rinse the olives and put in the bottles.

Flavour the olives - herbs, chillies, garlic - to your taste.

Mix 10 l water and add 1 cup salt to a solution.

Make a brine from 2/3 of the salt solution plus 1/3 good quality brown vinegar. (if you prefer more acidy brine make it half salt solution and half vinegar).

Bring to a boil and pour over olives until covered.

Pour olive oil on top to seal and close lids tightly.



## PORTION 36 OLIVE ORCHARD'S NATURAL KALAMATAS

Fully ripe olives of the same size in cold water overnight.

Cure in 10 percent salt solution in plastic drums. Change the brine every 10-14 days.

After 6 weeks, start tasting the olives. Stop the curing when de-bittered to taste.

Rinse the olives in fresh water, then put them in sterilised jars and leave the olives standing for a few hours to darken.

Fill the jars with clean water and put a lid on tightly.

These natural olives without added preservatives and with reduced lactic acid should be treated as fresh products. Once the bottle has been opened it needs to be kept in the fridge, and be eaten in a week. But isn't that the whole idea with Kalamata olives anyway...?

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*Portion 36 Kalamata Club in the Orchard 2012*



*Portion 36 Kalamata Club get together November 2013*

A black plastic crate filled with dark blueberries. The berries are densely packed and show some natural color variation, with some appearing more purple or reddish. A metal handle is visible at the top of the crate.

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