



Government  
of South Australia

# WEED IDENTIFICATION NOTES

ANIMAL AND PLANT CONTROL COMMISSION

## OLIVES



*Olive seedling*



*Olive flowers*



*Cleared hillside invaded by olive trees*



*Olive fruits*

The olive tree, *Olea europaea*, was introduced from the Mediterranean area as a tree crop. It is now established in many parts of South Australia, causing a major problem in native vegetation.

## Distribution

Eyre Peninsula	- isolated infestations but high risk of spread to native vegetation
Northern pastoral	- common in southern Flinders Ranges, isolated plants elsewhere
Northern ag districts / Yorke Peninsula	- common on roadsides and native vegetation in the higher rain fall areas
Murray Mallee	- isolated outbreaks along the Murray River and in irrigated areas
South East	- isolated plants on roadsides and some reserves
Central region	- common in the Mt Lofty Ranges

## Impacts

Olive is an invader of native vegetation, especially dry sclerophyll forest or woodland, and adjoining cleared, ungrazed land. If uncontrolled it can alter the composition, decrease biodiversity and increase the fire hazard of native vegetation. As it is very long-lived, such changes are permanent unless controlled.

The fruit and oil of the olive tree have a high commercial value and the industry is currently undergoing a boom, resulting in larger areas of plantations throughout South Australia.

## Recognition

Olive is an erect, bushy evergreen tree growing to about 12 m tall with a deep, widely-branched, woody root system. The trunk branches from the base and has rough black bark. Leaves are undivided, narrowly elliptic and tapered to a point, glossy dark green on top, silvery below, 3 to 8cm long and 1 to 4cm wide. The tiny cream flowers appear in large clusters in late spring; each has four petals and four protruding stamens. The fruit reaches 1.5 to 3cm long, ellipsoid in shape and purple-black when fully ripe; each contains one brown oblong seed about 1.5cm long.

Olive seedlings have smaller oblong leaves arranged rigidly in opposite pairs. They are densely branched and can produce many new stems from the base if cut or grazed.

## Biology

Olive grows well in most environments, particularly where winter rainfall is high and summers dry. It will grow on a wide range of soil types but will not survive in waterlogged soil. Like eucalypts, olives are highly inflammable due to their oil content and can regenerate from stumps after fire.

Seeds germinate mainly in autumn and seedlings grow during winter. Flowering does not begin for several years. Flowers appear in October/November and fruit develops slowly over summer. The ripe fruits hang on the tree for a long period during the following winter.

The spread of olives is mainly due to birds and foxes eating the fruit and dropping the seeds elsewhere. The development of olive orchards has led to spread throughout the State. Some seed may be moved locally in soil during earthworks.

## Further Information :

APCC (1999) *Risk Assessment and Management of Olives*.

Parsons, W.T., Cuthbertson, E.G. (2000). *Noxious Weeds of Australia*. 2nd edn. Inkata Press.

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**For more advice on recognising and controlling olive, contact your local Animal and Plant Control Board :**