

Oliver Olive

Based on the true story history of California olives

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Hola! Vosotros qui 'en son? Yo me llamo Oliver Olive, a little olive in a small branch of an olive tree cutting. This year is 1749, and I am traveling with a group of Franciscan priests. I can hear Father Junipero Serra speaking about how exciting it is to be heading to the new world.

I don't know how he can be excited with all the seasickness and the shortage of food and water we are facing. We are sailing across the Atlantic Ocean. The strong winds and storms toss our small, crowded ship as if a child was playing with a toy boat in the bathtub. I was turning greener than I already was! My pit in my tummy was just not feeling well!

After three months at sea, we finally arrived on Mexico's coastline. We then traveled by donkey to Mexico City. Father Serra was so excited to start settling in California and talked about planting me, his little olive cutting, and planting more cuttings to grow more trees.

Something must have happened to Father Serra because his leg was in a lot of pain as we traveled from Mexico City to California. Father Pablo, another priest traveling with us, would put oils from my ancestors on Father Serra's wound. He still made the long journey.

On July 1, 1769, we arrived in California with Father Serra, other Franciscan priests, and Governor of Baha California, Gaspar de Portola. Some men greeted us with cheers.

Father Serra planted my little cutting in the soil. As he planted me, he told me, "We are blessed, little olive. We have made it to California. This will be the capital of agriculture someday, and you are the first olive tree ever planted here."

Father Serra went on to explain to me that California was home to more than 2,000 different kinds of soils with its unique blend of valleys, foothills, mountains, coastal areas and deserts. This was a great combination to produce different kinds of crops.

After my tree grew, it was able to provide more olives that priests used at the missions for fueling lamps, cooking, making soap, lubricating the machines, healing wounds and, most importantly, as holy oils for baptizing new Catholics and anointing the sick.

The process to turn us little olives into oil is quite simple. We are grown, cured, and then pressed under a large stone wheel to take the oils. When the mission priests had enough oils, they would trade the extra oils for other goods from the Native Americans.

As time passed, California did grow to become the capital of agriculture. Many olive trees were planted and now the top olive-producing counties in California are Tulare, San Joaquin, Glenn, Tehama and Fresno. California farmers grow four main varieties of olives. California produces more than 400 different crops.

Did you know that olives are fruit? Many people did not know that. Olive oil continues to be used for cooking, as salad dressing, soothing dry skin, and so many other uses. And it all started with me, Oliver Olive.