



Community Olive Oil Initiatives.

With a more detailed look at the Barwon Oil Barons.

The olive tree is a most remarkable tree, its cultural significance to many families of the earth should never be underestimated. It features on the flags of 7 nations and the flag of the United Nations. The olive branch is a recognised symbol of peace and a golden olive branch was left on the moon's surface, symbolic of man's desire for peace. All parts of the tree are useful: the leaves for medicine, wood for timber and the fruit as table olives or pressed for oil. The olive tree is resistant to pest and diseases, tolerant of droughts and will grow in a wide range of climates and soils. There are quite literally thousands of these trees growing all over our backyards, streets, schools, parklands and farms, more than 80,000 trees within a 60km radius of Geelong is one estimate. (1) This has given rise to a host of community olive oil initiatives with people doing what they can, where they are, with what they have. This has been a sensible outcome and a great use of an existing resource. Most olive oil processors require a minimum 1 tonne of fruit, well beyond the abilities of most casual growers, pickers and households to collect. This makes them an ideal crop for a community collective. With the public having easy access to this existing resource, it is no surprise to see olive oil collectives spread across the bottom half of Australia, from the far reaches of Western Australia all the way down to the south of Tasmania. The harvest of 2023 included more than 10 community led events that resulted in over 35,000 Kg of fruit being pressed, resulting in over 4,000 litres of extra virgin olive oil being shared with community. Both the number of collectives and amount of fruit harvested has increased on a yearly basis and is likely to increase further.

MANIAN COUNTRY HOUR →

EASILY REPLICABLE

The sensibility of community olive oil events has seen them spread across the southern part of Australia, with events now taking place in Melbourne, Geelong, Bendigo, Wonthaggi, Hobart, Exeter, Perth and the Fleurieu Peninsula.

Olive oil collectives are extremely easy to replicate anywhere that olives are growing (cooler winter parts of Queensland to Southern Tasmania to Southern Western Australia and everywhere in between.) They are especially easy to replicate where an industry partner can be involved. Industry partners are invaluable for their expertise, knowledge and of course their help in processing the fruit. Of the 10 known collectives from the 2023 harvest 9 of these had an industry partner responsible for pressing the fruit. Only the Wonthaggi group had their own press which they purchased with a grant; it is capable of processing 350 kg of fruit a day severely limiting the potential growth of their program. Local Government has also played a role in the success of many of these collectives. Some have received funding from local government, some have utilised council facilities as drop off points and many pickers have accessed the trees planted by council on road reserves, community centres and parkland.

Street trees are chosen based on

- street appeal
- local character
- height & size restrictions
- water requirements
- preferred soil conditions.

The Olive trees beauty, tolerance to drought and ability to grow in a wide range of conditions make it a very suitable street tree. The addition of berries is an added bonus for both humans and birds.

They help to:

- Reduce heat island effect of our streets
- Improve air quality
- Reduce wind
- Increase food security

Olive trees outside South Barwon Community Centre Geelong.

Having both Government and Industry collaborate with community has added benefits beyond the oil, there is the value of community engagement, the increase in product knowledge and awareness for the olive oil industry as a whole and brand awareness for the individual olive groves. There is the added benefit for councils wishing to meet tree canopy targets as we look to mitigate the effects of climate change and the heat island effect in our cities and of course the added benefit of beautifying our suburban streets and parks.

It is important to note just how critical the participating groves have been to the success of the various collectives. Their intimate knowledge of the trees and local environments is especially valuable in setting a date for the pick, the date needs to be set early enough that there is time for promotion and organising of the event. The date also needs to be at a time when the oil content of the fruit is near it maximum and when enough of the fruit will be black to balance the flavour of the oil as too much green fruit will increase pepperiness of the oil.

This vision must involve industry and local government, for any measure of success. Urban Ag. initiatives more often than not, require a collaborative effort of 3 or more Council teams: Planning, Parks and Gardens and Connected Communities. This can dramatically slow progress on projects.



Much of the heavy lifting for replicating these olive oil projects has been done, they are already an approved street tree in many, many municipalities and there are thousands growing along our streets, parks, schools and backyards

The Vic Health shared Vision of an equitable, regenerative, prosperous, and resilient food system that ensures access to healthy and culturally appropriate food for all Victorians, a system that values nourishment, fairness, dignity, democracy, participation, inclusivity and stewardship of the natural environment. Values: nourishment, fairness, dignity, democracy, participation, inclusivity and stewardship of the natural environment. This is certainly the highest of ideals to aim for, though not easy to understand what that vision may indeed look like, but easy to understand how a community olive oil collective ticks all the boxes. Especially the boxes of culturally appropriate food, participation, fairness, nourishment, inclusivity and stewardship of the natural environment.

South Australia	Management model	Olive Weight	Oil ltrs	Participants	Volunteers
<u>Fleurieu Peninsula</u>	Run by <u>Peninsula Providore Olive Grove</u> , they would look to work with a community group for future events as it is a busy time in the grove and was slightly overwhelmed with the amount of work.	120 kg	15 ltr	10	0
Tasmania					
<u>Exeter</u>	Run by <u>Lentara Olive Grove</u> with participants bringing their home grown olives to the grove.	1150 kg	156 ltr	??	?
<u>Hobart</u>	Run by <u>Freshfield Olive Grove</u> with participants bringing their home grown olives to the grove.	1239 Kg	166 ltr	??	?
Victoria					
<u>Geelong</u>	Community run event by the Barwon Oil Barons working with <u>Mount Moriac Olives</u> . 4 drop off points around Geelong.	4560 Kg	480 ltr	80	10
<u>Melbourne</u>	Run by CERES 3000 Acres with local government and community groups. Across 4 locations and 2 events the harvest and then the oil pickup day. Other festivities and workshops were included as well demonstration pressing with their own olive press. A number of processors were engaged for the pressing.	26000 Kg	2600 ltr	1600	30
<u>Wonthaggi</u>	Run by a community group who purchased their own olive press.	1020 Kg	110 ltr	30	6
Western Australia					
<u>North Fremantle Social Farm</u>	Run by the North Fremantle Social Farm.	1894 Kg	243 ltr	20	4

A total of

35,408 Kg

**of olives.
Yielding**

3,690 litres

**of precious
extra virgin
olive oil.**



The success of these programs if measured in terms of participation is overwhelming and the Hobsons Bay event (part of Ceres/3000 acres) attracted over 950 participants. Participants rated the event very highly at 4.6/5, and said the event helped them reduce waste (90%), feel more connected to others (67%) and nature (69%), and save money (67%).

A selection of qualitative feedback is provided below:

Here is what some participants have said about the event.....

“ I just love this event I know no other event like it, food has such a positive impact on people and especially when it can be shared.”

“ I just picked over 100kg of olives with a person I hardly knew, we both found it easier to work in pairs.”

“ Would love for this to be run again in Hobsons bay. Wonderful community event which helps reduce waste.I think it could keep growing into something bigger re food sharing / food waste. I am keen to volunteer to help next time. I loved the mix of cultures and generations of people involved. We have so much to learn from each other.”

“I loved this idea. The whole experience has been wonderful. I can’t wait to do it again next year.”

“ Just wanted to provide some feedback about the Olive Festival – having lived in Hobson’s Bay almost my whole life and recently getting my own place, it was a wonderful opportunity to connect with neighbours and locals. As we picked our olives in our front yard we had opportunities to chat and meet new neighbours walking past who had also picked some olives and planned to go to the festival. It was also great to meet other local organisations with an environmental approach and obtain some new plant[s] to support the biodiversity of the area. Hobson’s Bay is SO lucky to have this festival and I really hope there will be one next year and years to come. Huge thank you to you and all the volunteers who helped make it happen!!”

“As I waited in queue, I listened to people around me speak in Italian, Greek, Arabic, English, and Mandarin. I thought of how olive oil has been a common denominator for 1,000s of years among people in the Northern Mediterranean, i.e., Italy, Greece, Spain, Turkey, and the Southern Mediterranean: North Africa, and the Middle East. ... I was profoundly grateful that the Hobsons Bay Council and CERES had created such a thoughtful and humanising event which brought so many representatives of our community together to work cooperatively to produce a highly valued and much needed resource from nature.”

“We are sharing the oil with neighbours and everyone is really interested about the process and the event.”

Council Plan strategies and priorities	Olives 2 Oil outcomes
1.1 Celebrate the diversity of our community and provide equitable opportunities for all	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Celebrate our diverse food cultures through the common ground of olives and olive oil as important staple ingredients ➤ Provide an opportunity to carry out cherished olive harvesting traditions ➤ Host festive, inclusive community events that encourage social interaction ➤ Showcase multicultural food vendors and performers
1.4 Enable participation and contribution to community life, learning and inter-connection b) Boost the profile and awareness of opportunities for people to participate and contribute to community life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Bring the community together to take pride in our local olive harvest ➤ Provide opportunities for cross-cultural learning through presenters, performances, and cooking and gardening workshops ➤ Create opportunities for neighbours to connect while harvesting local olive trees ➤ Promote local community organisations and cultural associations ➤ Provide opportunities for volunteering at the events
2.1 Increase resource recovery and reducing landfill across Council’s waste services and improve the customer experience of waste services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Transform at least 6 tonnes of olives that would otherwise be wasted into a healthy and high value staple food ➤ Promote other waste reduction behaviours and Council waste programs and services at the events to a new audience
2.2 Enhance protection, preservation and promotion of our coastal environment and wetlands/waterways, biodiversity and natural areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Raise public awareness of olives as weeds in grassland ecosystems and the need to manage the seed load of urban olives through harvesting ➤ Promote other actions that support biodiversity and Council waste programs and services at the events to a new audience
2.3 Increase tree canopy cover within Hobsons Bay to reduce the urban heat island effect, improve air quality and enhance general amenity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Encourage planting of resilient, productive canopy species like olives that are suited to the current and future climate of Hobsons Bay ➤ Promote other Council urban forest initiatives and distribute canopy trees for planting on residential land to a new audience
3.4 Increase participation in recreation activities across the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Promote gardening as a popular outdoor recreational activity and provide information on opportunities to get involved in My Smart Garden and community garden initiatives

“The councils we work with absolutely love Olives to Oil, they can see the enthusiasm and how much people love it and the power of the community connections. As olive oil is such a significant staple food for so many, the project brings a whole new audience and one that is often difficult for councils to engage with.” Merrin Layden - Ceres 3000 Acres

Europe's olive oil supply running out after drought - and the odd hailstorm

Heatwaves around Mediterranean have damaged harvests and forced producers to import from South America



“If Melbourne’s European community can’t import their favourite oil from the towns they grew up in, then we may be looking at double or triple the 26,000 Kg next year.” Merrin Layden

Olive oil industry in crisis as Europe’s heatwave threatens another harvest

World’s biggest olive producer, Spain, on course for second bad harvest in a row, raising fears of gaps on shelves and even higher prices



📷 ‘Even if Spain produces the predicted 850,000 tonnes, the price situation is worse,’ said Walter Zanre, the CEO of the UK arm of Filippo Berio. Photograph: agsaz/Alamy

The olive oil industry is “in crisis”, and the heatwave in southern [Europe](#) is threatening to inflict the second bad harvest in a row and gaps on shelves this autumn.

Many Melbournian's of European decent still look to import their favourite olive oil from their home towns, if the European harvest fails for a second straight year, this may prove difficult. Fortunately, we have such an amazing resource growing quite literally on our doorstep. It was estimated that only 2 – 4% of available trees were harvested this season for oil so potentially next season or the following the combined harvest could exceed 200,000 Kgs. Delivering 20,000 litres of precious oil.



One potential area for improvement and growth for the project would be to try and involve school groups. The olive is an obvious choice for school grounds with their many curriculum links and where they enjoy a level of neglect. If a mobile olive press was available olives could potentially be pressed at the school making for a truly paddock to plate experience. Links to other parts of the curriculum could be made via label making, sustainability or health classes.

For anyone wishing to replicate the project the Geelong model has worked well with sustained growth in both numbers and volume since 2019. The 2023 harvest included 10 volunteers 80+ participants and resulted in 4500 kg of fruit being harvested. The Geelong group had a six person committee meeting every few months and more regularly in the lead up to harvest. The Geelong group has an industry partner Mount Moriac Olives.





In 2019 a small group of people in Geelong region combined olives they picked for processing to olive oil. We picked 580 kilos.



- In 2019 we picked 580 kilos
- In 2021 we picked 1845 kilos
- In 2023 with the help of a committee, and some council funding, we expanded to 4 drop off sites and collected 4500 kilos of olives.
- Community Members of all cultures and ages joined in the fun!

Barwon Oil Barons founder Rosie Bright

“ The idea came to me when I moved to Belmont and my trees produced 120 kilograms of olives.

We've found that people are thrilled to be involved because it's too much to organise pressing on their own and they are keen to be reliant on existing local food sources.

It's a lot of fun to pick the olives but most of all, there is something so special about using olive oil you have contributed to, sharing it with friends and family and cooking with your own produce.

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<https://photos.app.goo.gl/HRSJPvabg3mQ94NV7>

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Steven Parker – Owner Moriac Olives

“ This is a great community wellbeing initiative that creatively deals with the waste of unharvested olives and provides a delicious healthy benefit to the people involved.

I am proud to support the Barwon Oil Barons and can see this growing into a considerably larger program over time, given the proliferation of the olive trees throughout the suburbs and city fringes across our amazing region.

There are more than 80,000 olive trees within 60 kilometres of Geelong, not including residential and small hobby groves. Building a community program around the fringe of the larger local industry will build on the reputation of our region as a producer of great quality boutique EVO olive oils and help build a loyal local consumer base.

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OLIVES TO OIL ✨

Community Olive Harvesting Day
Saturday 20 May 12pm-3pm



Thanks to: Rosie Bright, Kat Lavers, Steve Parker Moriac Olives, Mel at Peninsula Providore, Merrin at CERES 3000Acres, Freshfield Grove, Martin and Sophie Grace, Wonthaggi art collective and especially the many volunteers that bring these events to life.



<https://www.kitchengardenfoundation.org.au/content/school-olive-project-comes-good-oil>

<https://www.abc.net.au/listen/programs/tas-country-hour/olive-harvest/102455980>

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-06-17/olive-pressing-sees-a-rush-to-crush/100206186>

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/rTKf51PAriXC57EAA>

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/HRSJpvabg3mQ94NV7>

<https://www.ceresfairfood.org.au/news/olive-stories/>