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## Olive Festival and Auction Coming Up

By Sophie Braccini



Toris Jaeger inspects young olives Photo Ohlen Alexander

the grove for years and knew of its historical value. She asked olive expert Sean McCauley (of McCauley Brothers) to take a look at the orchard. "Sean was quite impressed with the trees," she said, "he estimated they were worth a lot of money, and once pruned, the bigger ones could produce 2000 to 3000 pounds of olives a year." FWRNA's hope is to one day produce award-winning olive oil, just as the Wagner family made more than a hundred years ago.

Why an olive festival? "Olive trees are symbols of peace and prosperity, but they are also a growing agriculture resource here in California and it is time we celebrate the tree, its crop and its local history," concludes Barrett.

The Wagner Ranch Nature Area is at the southeast corner of the intersection of Bear Creek Road and Camino Pablo. For more information go to [www.fwrna.org](http://www.fwrna.org).

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An ancient fruit: Olive oil has been used throughout history for everything from ensuring good health to religious and cultural ceremonies, including the anointing of Olympic athletes, babies and dead people; a well-rounded fruit, the olive. Olive tree cultivation is said to predate the written language. Although native to Asia Minor, mythology has it that the goddess Athena gifted the olive to the Greeks. Franciscan missionaries brought the olive to California, planting not only missions but olive orchards as they made their way northward. Move over, California wine - California olive oil is the new hot topic. Get ready for all things olive!

"The Wagner Ranch Nature Area's heritage olive grove was planted by California's first Surveyor General, Theodore Wagner, in the 1880s," says Kathy Barrett of the Friends of the Wagner Ranch Nature Area (FWRNA), which will host the first annual Olive Festival at Orinda's Wagner Ranch Nature Area on Sunday, October 10th from 1:00-4:00 p.m. The festival is free and will offer fun for all ages, including a silent auction to benefit FWRNA's educational program.

FWRNA has a fundraising goal of \$15,000 for this event, which will be used to preserve the 40-year tradition of offering hands-on activities to teach Orinda children about our environment and how early residents lived in harmony with nature. Several local artists are donating enchanting works to the auction, including a hand-painted silk art quilt by well-known quilter Grace Kaplan; a Susan Kendall landscape painted exclusively for the Olive Festival; and a giant snail - a whimsical garden sculpture by Eileen Fitz-Faulkner and Susie Parr.

Brentwood's McCauley Brothers Olive Grove will bring different olives and olive oils for tasting at the festival. Cooks can enjoy demonstrations by local restaurateur Mariam Lavecchia, of Trattoria Lupetti, and Savory Affairs. For the younger audience, there will be games, olive-tasting, tree-planting, music and art, Living History skits and more.

"We will give away little olive trees to those who want to take one home," says Nature Area naturalist Toris Jaeger, who has admired