



Olive season at Kureelpa Park

by Tonya Jennings - On The Ridge Cooking School

Eleanor Dark's book *Lantana Lane*, (1959), was about a small farming community living in Lantana Lane, inland from the Pacific coast, where the pineapple plantations grew, and where the folk were 'all firmly and happily wedded to the land'. It is said that Lantana Lane is Mill Hill Road at Maleny, but we do not know for sure. However, this description could apply to Kureelpa Falls Road at Kureelpa today.

Kureelpa Falls Road is in a small rural hamlet near Mapleton, where a diverse group of people live, coming from many countries including France, Belgium, Latvia, Germany and England. The people are also doing many different things – painting and exhibiting at Kureelpa Fine Art Gallery, growing macadamia nuts at Kumanu, breeding and raising horses, grazing cattle, growing flowers commercially, teaching cooking at On the Ridge and the latest venture, growing olives at Kureelpa Park.

Jenny and Peter Varley, purchased their 26 acre property, on Kureelpa Falls Road in 1998, to breed horses and grow olives. They planted 1000 olive trees in April 1999 - Manzanillo and Frantoio (Paragaon). Manzanillo is regarded as one of Spain's finest varieties with high productivity and high quality fruit, excellent for the table and for good quality olive oil. Frantoio or Paragon Olive is the most noted Tuscan

variety with an excellent nutty flavour and is a good producer of both oil and quality fruit, with slightly higher oil content than the Manzanillo.

Now it is their first harvest and they are treating it as an experimental one – studying the best processes, techniques and methods, for their purpose. They have given kilos away to neighbours and friends, with the view of collecting together all the various processes that have been used in treating, curing and marinating. At Kureelpa Park they follow the Greek curing method, a completely natural process that uses no chemicals. In fact, the property is very carefully managed without using sprays or chemical fertilizers on the trees. Next year they will press for oil.

Picked straight from the tree, olives are inedible; they need to be cured in order to remove the bitter flavour, then preserved in oil or brine. Green olives are the youngest and are very hard and very bitter; whereas black olives are fully mature and plump. Select fresh, plump and unbruised olives.

One natural curing process involves making a small slit or fork prick into each olive, totally immersing them in a bucket of cold water, changing the water every second day, for 40 days, until the olives are no longer bitter. Alternatively you may soak



the olives in salted water, changing daily for 10 – 14 days.

After curing, when the olives no longer have a bitter taste, drain and cover them with rocksalt.

Leave for 2 days, then wash the olives well in cold water and pack them into sterilized jars with pieces of preserved or fresh lemon, some slivers of garlic and some sprigs of thyme. Cover with olive oil or red wine vinegar or half and half. Seal and leave for

2 weeks before eating. These will keep for 6 months.

There is a variety of different herbs and aromatics you may use to infuse olives with flavour. Try orange, thyme, rosemary or oregano; garlic, peppercorns, citrus zest and bay leaves; preserved lemon, finely sliced, with thyme and flat leafed parsley; cumin seeds, chopped chilli, garlic and a bay leaf.

For more information on olives and a delicious olive tapenade recipe check the website - www.ontheridge.com.au.