

Reading Explorer 2, Unit 1: Olive Oil

Narrator:

Throughout much of the Mediterranean, olives are an important aspect of everyday life. Walk through any Greek market, and you'll find evidence of how important they really are. Here, on the island of Naxos, you'll see them in different sizes and in different colors: green, black, brown ...

Tourist:

"I must admit, I was around olive trees most of my life, and it wasn't until several years back that I found out the green olive and the black olive came from the same tree."

Narrator:

Like this tourist, a lot of people assume that black and green olives come from different trees. In fact, most people probably wouldn't recognize an olive tree. This time of year, on the hills of Naxos, the olive trees have flowers on them. Without the fruit, though, the tree isn't easy to identify.

Christina Lefteris:

"In this area, between Monitsia and the other village of Moni, which is up in the hills, there are some of the very old olive trees."

Narrator:

To make green olives, you need to collect them when they are still young.

Christina Lefteris:

"There are small ones and giant ones and people decide which ones they prefer. Well, I like all of them. I think I would never say no to any olive."

Narrator:

Not everyone has the same liking for them.

Person 1:

"I don't like them. I hate them."

Person 2:

"Yesterday, I ordered a pizza and it had olives on it and I couldn't take it."

Person 3:

"Oh, no, no. It tastes old, it taste ugly."

Narrator:

It's true that olives are old. Some trees have been alive for thousands of years. In fact olives have been an important part of life here since the early days of Greek civilization. In Greek tradition, Eirene, the goddess of peace, is shown carrying an olive branch. Even today, olives are associated with peace. If people want to end a war, they are said to "offer an olive branch."

Katharina Bolesch:

"From the olive tree, you can actually make ... you can use everything. There is nothing you throw away. "

Narrator:

Katharina Bolesch owns a remarkable shop in Naxos where everything is made from olives.

Katharina Bolesch:

"You eat the olives, you make oil from it. You can make a kind of tea from the leaves."

Narrator:

Olive oil accounts for much of Greece's olive production. To produce the best liquid, olives are collected and processed once they have become black. The sooner they are pressed, the better the oil.

Used for cooking, for light - and occasionally as medicine - the oil is believed to give good health and long life to those who use it.

Christina Lefteris:

"They're very valuable for vitamins and their oils are very healthy."

Narrator:

And the olive trees themselves also help to give the land a feeling of peace.

Christina Lefteris:

"You can have a look around and understand that all these trees are not aggressive. Their color is a little soft ... all their shape is quite mild. Something that lasts long, gives fruits, I think it's a good feeling of what peace means."