

Stop 182 Kid's Tour – Olive, Cool Temperate House

If you've ever eaten an olive, then you know how salty they are. But did you know why? Olives, which are the olive tree's fruit, are naturally very hard and bitter. So after they're harvested, they need to be soaked in salty water to soften them up. The olive tree was one of the first known trees in Asia Minor grown for use as a food crop - people have been growing them for over 7000 years! A young olive tree like this one has smooth gray bark. But as it gets older, the tree gets very gnarled - some can live for hundreds of years!

Eventually the olive tree made its way to Greece. According to Greek mythology, the city of Athens was named after the goddess Athena because she made one sprout out of the ground as a gift to the city. Whether you believe that story or not, olive trees *were* a very important part of life in ancient Greece. Their fruit, and more importantly the oil that could be squeezed out of the fruit, was in great demand. Trading ships carrying hundreds of Grecian urns filled with olive oil sailed the seas to help make Greece a wealthy civilization. It's hard to believe that a tree could play such big of a role in the history of one country. Maybe that's why the winners of the first Olympic games were crowned with wreaths made of olive branches! But the olive has also gone on to make its' mark on the whole world. It's the symbol for peace at the United Nations, where their logo is the planet earth being held by two olive branches.