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Olive Season 2026:

A Plentiful Harvest, Late to Ripen



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Jordan enters the 2026 olive season with a plentiful crop after the harshest year in a long time. The Ministry of Agriculture estimates fruit production at around 220,000 tonnes and oil production at around 30,000 tonnes, enough to meet local market demand of 25,000 to 30,000 tonnes and leave a surplus. Last season, according to the Department of Statistics, output fell to just 16,342 tonnes, a drop of nearly 54% on the season before. Even so, the first days of pressing, after the mills opened on 15 October, brought a striking paradox: there is plenty of fruit, but oil extraction rates have been so low that many farmers are worried.

The Institute believes this paradox points to late ripening rather than a weak season. Tracing the weather the trees have been through since flowering explains what is happening in the mills today, and helps farmers choose the right time to harvest.

The Season in Its Climatic Context

The season began with a long, wet winter. The Ministry of Water and Irrigation described the 2025–2026 rainy season as excellent, with rainfall above 130% of the national average. Most of it fell in the centre, south and east rather than the north, where the dams did not fill completely. After one of the weakest seasons on record, this was a long-awaited relief for rain-fed olive groves, which depend on rainfall alone.

Winter's effects then lasted longer than usual. May was cooler than normal, with frequent unsettled weather, strong winds and dust, and this had a direct effect on the olives. Tayseer Al-Najdawi, Head of the Syndicate of Olive Press Owners and Olive Producers, explains that the long winter stretched fruit set into May and June. Every stage of fruit growth was delayed as a result, and ripening with it.

Summer brought its own pressures. In early August a heatwave pushed temperatures several degrees above average. Fayyad Fayyad, an adviser to the International Olive Council, notes that extreme heat temporarily halts oil formation inside the fruit. Early rain then fell at the start of October. It helped by washing off dust and reducing insect numbers, but as the General Federation of Jordanian Farmers stresses, it does not increase the amount of oil in the fruit.

What happened this season is not a passing local event. It reflects a pattern that has become familiar across the Mediterranean basin. Recent research suggests that repeated heatwaves, droughts and sudden heavy rain now disrupt flowering, fruit set and ripening more than the gradual rise in temperature does. Through all of this, what matters most is that the fruit is picked once it is ripe, and not before.

One distinction confuses many people. Rain that benefits the oil is rain that falls while the fruit is growing, from spring through summer, when oil builds up in the fruit little by little. That rain gives the tree the water it needs to make oil, so the fruit's actual oil content rises. Rain in the days just before harvest adds no oil at all, because the oil was either formed or not formed weeks earlier. It only raises the fruit's water content and so its fresh weight, which makes the oil percentage measured against that weight look lower than it really is. In other words, late rain lowers the apparent percentage rather than raising it. The deciding factor remains whether the fruit is fully ripe when picked: if it is, its oil has formed, whatever the rain of the last few days.

What Do the Low Oil Yields Mean?

To understand these figures, we need to separate the oil actually stored in the fruit from the percentage shown at the mill, which is measured against the fruit's fresh, wet weight. The first is the real picture; the second can mislead when the fruit holds a lot of water.

Reports from the mills put extraction rates in the first days below 10%, reaching 13% in some cases. Shafa Al-Ghor recorded between 12% and 17%, and farmers in Ajloun estimate this year's rate at 16–18%, compared with about 25% last season.

The low yields have two different causes. The first is that much of the fruit being picked now is still green and has not finished forming its oil. This is a real shortfall, and only time will fix it. The second is that rainwater held in the fruit lowers the percentage measured against wet weight without reducing the oil inside. This is only an apparent shortfall, and it disappears when oil is measured against dry weight.

To tell the two apart, international references use two tools that work together. The first measures oil against dry weight rather than wet weight. Once the oil content on a dry-weight basis stops rising from one sample to the next, the fruit is considered to have reached its maximum oil content. It is then ready to harvest, even if the percentage on a wet-weight basis still looks low.

The second is the maturity index, the same scale on which the Institute's field guide is built. It is known internationally as the Jaén index, after the Spanish olive research station where researchers Uceda and Frías developed it in 1975, and the International Olive Council has adopted it as an official standard. It puts optimum ripeness for oil at around 3.5 on a scale of 0 to 7, and recommends checking again every seven to ten days, the same rhythm that this season's recommendations follow.

Regional studies on similar varieties support this approach. A Palestinian study on the Nabali Baladi variety found that oil content rises the later the harvest, with a strong link between fruit colour and oil percentage, and that phenolic compounds peak around the start of November before starting to decline. An Algerian study on the Chemlal variety sets the optimum window between late September and late October.

On 17 October, the Syndicate of Olive Press Owners therefore called on farmers to stop harvesting for more than two weeks and to wait until the end of October or early November. Al-Najdawi estimates the fruit needs another two to three weeks to ripen. The Irbid Agriculture Directorate, which covers the Kingdom's largest olive-growing area, recommended delaying the harvest until late November. The season is running about two to three weeks behind schedule, with variation between regions: the Jordan Valley and warmer areas are ahead of the northern highlands. Extraction rates are expected to rise gradually as the fruit changes colour through November.

The Institute's Position and Recommendations

The Institute recognises that farmers have real reasons to harvest early. Many families are coming out of a difficult season and need income soon. The availability and cost of labour, fears of heavy rain, frost and fruit theft, and the habit of harvesting at weekends are all real pressures. The mills, for their part, are keen to run their lines from the very first days. Even so, harvesting early in a season with late fruit set leaves farmers with a double loss: they pay the pressing fee, which this season stands at 75 piastres per kilogram of oil, on a larger quantity of fruit, and they get less oil per tin in return.

The aim, therefore, is to harvest at the right time, not to delay for its own sake. Waiting too long increases fruit drop and olive fruit fly infestation and lowers oil quality. The Institute's recommendations are as follows:

- Base the decision to harvest on the condition of the fruit in each field, not on the calendar or on what the neighbours are doing.
- Harvest in stages: start with the fields that have ripened, hold off on the rest, and check again every seven to ten days.
- Judge ripeness by fruit colour, and confirm that oil formation is complete on a dry-weight basis, not a wet-weight basis.
- Make bitter early oil a deliberate choice for a limited quantity, pressed immediately after picking, not for the whole crop.
- Harvest fields affected by olive fruit fly first, and press the fruit immediately, whenever infestation pressure is high.
- Have the agriculture directorates, the National Agricultural Research Center (NARC) and the Syndicate work together to publish regular ripeness readings for each region.

The point of early oil needs some explanation. Early oil is a deliberate product with a growing market. Many consumers seek out early-harvest, high-phenolic virgin olive oil, sold in bottles with a stated harvest date at prices above those of ordinary oil. Producers in smaller countries even harvest early on purpose so that they can compete on quality rather than quantity. The condition is that it must be a conscious choice: fruit whose oil has formed, pressed immediately after picking, with quality control, not a rushed harvest of green fruit whose oil has not yet formed. In practice, the first to arrive at the mills are often growers of table olives for pickling. Some of the fruit picked early for the table turns out to be unsuitable for pickling, and the best option is to press it into premium virgin oil under the same conditions so that it is neither wasted nor sold cheaply.

To make this decision easier, the Institute is offering its Field Guide to Timing the Olive Harvest free of charge. The guide works for every season. It explains step by step how to calculate the maturity index and read the result, and it also covers good practice in harvesting, transport and pressing. It is a one-page decision tool that complements and is consistent with, NARC's Technical Guide to Olive Cultivation in Jordan. It can be downloaded from the Institute's website.

These tools will have limited impact unless local readings reach every farmer. The Institute therefore calls on the directorates, NARC and the Syndicate to build a system that collects regular ripeness readings for each region from field monitoring stations and makes them freely available. There is a proven model to follow: Andalusia's Phytosanitary Alert and Information Network (RAIF), in operation since 1996. It covers most of the region's olive area with hundreds of stations and issues free, regular bulletins summarising ripeness and pest pressure, including olive fruit fly, for each area.

The foundation for a Jordanian equivalent already exists in the weekly olive mill survey carried out by the Ministry with the Department of Statistics. All it lacks is a link to field ripeness readings, so that each farmer receives accurate local information to base their decision on.

These technical details are not a luxury. In Jordan, olives are more than a crop. The country has more than 20 million olive trees covering around 130,000 hectares, nearly 72% of the land under fruit trees, and investment in the sector exceeds US$1.5 billion. Jordan has been self-sufficient in olive oil since 2000 and now ranks among the world's ten largest producers. Above all, olives provide income for thousands of families and are a core part of the country's heritage. Jordanian baladi olive oil deserves to be picked at the right time: not before, and not after.

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