

Seedling olive control 101

They say you need to do 10,000 repetitions to develop muscle memory and become an expert at something. Using this definition I can safely say I am an expert at finding and pulling seedling olives. Here are my olive control tips.

1. When

- easiest to pull winter/ spring when ground is moist;
- easiest to see summer/ autumn when less cover;
- year-round works for me – as in voting get them ‘early and often’

2. Travel light

- carry secateurs ± mini-mattock ± multigrips;
- turn any walk into any olive hunt

3. Where - olive seedlings occur everywhere but are most abundant:

- in areas recently cleared of mature olives;
- near other seedlings – if you find one, look carefully within 1-2 metres – olive seeds are dispersed in multiples by birds, foxes & deer;
- under trees – birds sit in them, deer rest under them & ‘disperse’ seeds;
- amongst fallen branches – young seedlings are protected from grazing, are more difficult to see & easily missed by past olive hunters

4. Know your target – other plants can be confused with olive seedlings

- eg. bursaria, hopbush & raspworts;
- olive leaves are dark green above, pale green below;
- olives have entire (non-serrated) leaf margins & are hard to the touch

5. Work systematically

- select an area & cover it all;
- walk upslope - less likely to slip; less distance to bend; easier on the back

6. Pull out seedlings if possible

- pulling lessens risk of re-growth;
- bend knees, keep back straight, lift using legs to avoid back injury;
- grasp as low as possible to ground – less likely to break stems;
- if stem breaks – pull out root or cut below ground to stop re-growth

7. When you come to a dense patch

- place pulled seedlings in a pile to distinguish from un-pulled ones;
- put on clear ground/ logs out of the way;
- view from different angles & heights to find those last couple;
- step back to review cleared area – there is always one you’ve missed

8. Options for larger seedlings

- dig around base, cut side roots and/ or main root & pull out, or:
- dig a hole on one side and snap off main roots below lignotuber by pushing the tree towards the hole with your boot, or:

- grasp the entire plant & use it as a handle to twist the plant out of the ground;
- remove all traces of the lignotuber or dab with 1:5 glyphosate

9. *Avoid pulling re-growth (suckers) from treated olives*

- these need chemical treatment either by spraying or 'drill & fill';
- regrowth occurs next to old stumps, is often very dense and/or multi-stemmed, and has no 'give' when pulled

10. *Even experts miss some*

- don't worry, we all miss lots – small ones, hidden ones, obvious ones;
- that's why we go back every year

Peter Bird