

I hate olives, let me make that clear from the start. I can taste that rancid flavor in a dish even if an olive only glanced at it with its dark, oily eyeball. So, the fact that I have two large, very productive olive trees in my yard serves only to further our mutual dislike. Each year, they grow, first green, then black, reminding me they yet persist. Each year, I revel in their plummeting whistle, and in the sound of my dog devouring their evil flesh, crunching happily on their bitter hearts. But, running out of just about every other option of entertaining my 6 year-old daughter, and feeling the need to up my science-experimenting dad cred, I declared in November of 2020 that we would learn how to pick and cure the plentiful crop burdening our trees. It was my idea. That's what the pandemic had reduced me to.

So, up the ladders we went, searching for the 'best' olives. She had a blast searching, and it was a new and therefore exciting way to spend a weekend, breaking the pandemic-created monotony. We ended up with about 3 5-gallon buckets, each hollow 'plunk' growing fainter as they crowded toward the top. After the harvest, we watched the plentiful YouTube videos on curing olives; we learned about many different methods – the hot water, cold water, and salt water cures, the stick 'em in the fridge cures, etc. The one my daughter most wanted to try was a salt-water cure that required us to pit the olives first.

We pitted, and pitted, and pitted. And by we, I mean she and I for about the first 100 olives, and then me, alone, covered in the smell of my pitted enemy, for the next 1000. Pitting olives is not a clean business - part of their revenge, I suppose. For me, the pandemic will permanently sound like my daughter yelling "how about this one, dad?" and smell like wet, pungent, earthy, and slightly sweet smashed olives.

Since I don't eat olives, and I've cleverly turned my daughter against them as well, it was up to my wife to volunteer to taste them after their month-long salt bath. Judging from the look on her face, we won't be curing olives again anytime soon. But, if nothing else, the pandemic has taught me to never say never.