

Harvest timing for apples and pears

Over the past 20 years as an OSU Extension agent in Douglas County, I have noticed that home orchard producers seem to have trouble trying to determine when pears and apples are ready to harvest.

This is especially true when we have very hot years like 2015 and 2021, and cool years like 2010 and 2011.

Harvest timing is especially tricky with pears since there are both summer pears, like Bartlett, that will ripen on the tree and winter pears, like D'Anjou and Comice, that ripen off the tree and need to be harvested when firm.

To harvest a Bartlett pear at the best time for holding in your refrigerator, pick the fruit when full sized and just starting to change color from green to slightly yellow. This usually occurs during late August in our area.

Although this year I harvested Bartlett pears in the first half of August since we had such an early start to the season and we had more hot weather.

If you allow the fruit to ripen all the way to a bright yellow on the tree you will often have some core darkening and excessive softening if you try to store them. Bartlett pears should be kept in the refrigerator before leaving out a few each week to enhance the ripening process.

Harvesting D'Anjou or Comice pears at the proper time becomes a little more challenging. You need to know



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when the fruit has reached full size. Knowing when commercial pear producers are picking in our area can tip this off. In most years D'Anjou pears are picked during late September to the first half of October and Comice pears in mid to last half of October.

Another tip to when pears are ready is to hold a pear at the base and lift it horizontally while still attached to the tree. If the stem separates easily from the spur without tearing from the fruit it is mature.

A final step to check maturity is to cut a pear in half and look at the seeds. If the seeds are hard and brown, the fruit is ready.

Once you have picked your winter pears put them in cold storage for two to six weeks before trying to set them out to ripen. If you have ever had a pear from the store that shriveled, or turned brown in the center and got mushy or gritty, it may not have had enough cold storage time to help the ripening process.

Once you take pears out of cold storage it takes about five to seven days at room temperature for them to ripen. The longer pears are in cold storage the shorter time it



PHOTO BY STEVE RENQUIST

One way to test an apple's maturity is to look at the color of the bottom of the apple. If the background color is still green on a red apple, it is still immature.

takes for them to ripen when removed.

When preparing for apple harvest, focus on a couple of clues. Know the proper color and approximate size your apple variety should reach, then do seed and taste tests.

If you cut an apple in half and look at the seeds, they will be brown and hard when the apple is mature. Since apples ripen on the tree, you can also do a taste test to verify the fruit has reached the desired maturity.

If you want to store your apples in a refrigerator for a

few months it is very important to handle the apples gently to prevent bruising and sort them to remove any diseased or damaged fruit.

Visit the Extension office Master Gardeners for literature showing the average harvest dates for apple varieties in western Oregon. This will help alert you to the approximate time your variety will be ready. Knowing what some of my apples are doing may help you focus in more accurately this year.

Gala apples were picked during the first week of

September, and it looks like both Empire and Liberty will be ready in the last half of September. Cameo and Spitzenburg will be ready in the first half of October while Red and Golden delicious apples will probably be ready in the last half of October. Braeburn and Granny Smith look like they will be mature in the first half of November.

Have a great harvest.

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