

When is the best time to harvest pears and apples?

Steve Castagnoli

CORVALLIS – Anticipation of ripe pears and apples peaks in fall as fruits hang heavily from branches and begin their gravity-aided trip to the ground.

But how do you know when it's prime picking time?

According to Steve Castagnoli, a horticulturist with Oregon State University's Extension Service, the signs are different for apples and pears.

"It's much easier to recognize ripeness in apples," he said. "Pears typically won't ripen to eating quality on the tree so you can't go out and taste one."

Still, there are signs. A mature pear will snap briskly and cleanly when tilted 90 degrees, according to Castagnoli. With

the most commonly grown varieties such as Comice, Bosc and D'Anjou, the fruit will typically change from green to a slightly paler color. The flesh will get lighter and have some juice on the surface when cut.

You can also go by maturity dates, which are included in OSU Extension's publication *Picking and Storing Apples and Pears*. However, dates can vary.

"It depends on when the season starts," Castagnoli said. "We go by bloom time. In general, the earlier the bloom, the earlier the harvest dates."

Except for being a little smaller than perfectly ready-to-pick pears, there's no harm in taking them off the tree a few days too early, he said. The essential part of ripening pears is keeping them in cold storage for about a month, depending

on the variety.

"Ideally, pears should be stored at below 40 degrees," Castagnoli said. "A refrigerator is good, but a freezer is too cold. An unheated garage usually will be too warm."

To tell when a pear is ripe, hold it gently but firmly in the palm of your hand and press your thumb just below the point where the stem joins the fruit. When the flesh beneath your thumb yields evenly to gentle pressure, it is time to eat your pear. If you have to push more than slightly, it is not ready yet.

Determining ripeness in apples, which don't need cold storage, is much easier than for pears, he said. Color is a useful indication. Apples may be yellow, red, green or combinations of these colors at harvest. When the green

has almost completely given way to yellow, a yellow variety is mature. With red blush or striped apples, the area where there is no red color usually changes from green to yellowish.

Ripe apples are easily separated from the tree, but don't pull the apple down to pick it. Rather, twist it upward with a rotating motion.

Another sign is when a few sound apples drop to the ground, which means the apples on the tree are nearly mature.

"The best way

to test an apple for ripeness," Castagnoli said, "is to cut it open and taste it."

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