

PEARS

PEARS In the Home Garden

Horticulture Branch,
B.C. Ministry of Agriculture and Food

There are many varieties of pears ripening from mid-August into late September.

The majority of pears are eaten fresh but they also make an excellent canned product. Bartlett is considered best for canning. Other uses for pears include dried pears, puree and pear wine (Perry).

PLANTING SITE

Pear trees prefer a deep, finely textured soil with good drainage. They are at their best on silt loams or clay loams of good depth. Pears do not thrive on gravelly soil. Pears are not quite as hardy as apples. Sites where winter temperatures frequently drop below -15°F . should be avoided as should sites which are prone to frequent spring frosts.

VARIETIES

Clapps Favorite matures in mid August. It is the earliest pear of good quality. It is subject to Fire Blight.

Bartlett a standard commercial variety, matures towards the end of August. It has excellent fresh eating as well as canning quality. Bosc is a fine-flavored dessert variety ripening in September. It has russeted skin.

Seckel is a small sized gourmet pear, useful for pickling as well as a dessert pear. It has russeted skin.

Anjou is a high quality winter dessert pear. It ripens in late September. It is a standard commercial variety.

Sierra is a new variety developed at Summerland, British Columbia, ripening in late September. This pear is hardy, has good flavor and will pollinate both Bartlett and Anjou.

POLLINATION

Cross-pollination is necessary. Plant at least two varieties that bloom at the same time. They should not be more than 30 feet apart. An alternative method is to plant only one tree and graft or bud branches of another variety onto it.

PLANTING DISTANCES

Bartlett trees can be placed as close as 15 feet apart. Most other varieties will need 20 to 25 foot spacing.

PLANTING

Select vigorous, one year old trees at the nursery. They will become established more quickly than older ones.

Dig a hole large enough to accommodate all the roots. Trim off any dead roots with a pair of sharp shears. Plant the tree an inch or so deeper than it stood in the nursery. Make sure the soil is thoroughly moist before planting. Cover the roots with top soil and tamp soil in firmly. Fill the hole with water before replacing all the soil.

TRAINING AND PRUNING

As soon as the tree is planted cut it back to a height of 30 inches and eliminate all side shoots. During successive prunings try to keep the tree well balanced. Maintain a central-leader by heading the central extension shoot by 1/3 or 1/2 every year. Lateral branches should be spread outwards by using wood or wire spreaders or by tying down. Keep these at an angle of around 45° from the vertical. This encourages early bearing.

As the trees start to bear, prune for convenience in picking and spraying and to allow light to enter all parts of the trees. Where branches tend to crowd, thin them out by removing some branches completely.

FERTILIZING

Consult the fertilizer recommendations issued by the British Columbia Department of Agriculture for your area. Aim for around 15" of new growth annually on branches growing outwards at an angle of 30° to 60° from the horizontal.

OTHER ELEMENTS

Deficiencies of other elements may occur. In the Okanagan regular applications of boron, zinc, and magnesium are required.

IRRIGATION

In the Interior Dry Belt of British Columbia, the trees will need a 12 hour watering every seven to twenty-one days depending on soil conditions and temperature. In areas receiving more than 30" of annual rainfall, irrigation may not be needed.

THINNING

On many pear varieties the fruit sets heavily and requires thinning to ensure adequate fruit size and to prevent overloading of the tree. Varieties such as Bartlett should be thinned by removing the small fruitlets in June. An average spacing of 8" between fruits is usually adequate for Bartletts.

PEST AND DISEASE CONTROL

The most serious pests are Pear Psylla, Codling Moth and Fire Blight. Instructions for control of pests and diseases may be found in the publication "Pest Control for the Home Garden" issued by the British Columbia Department of Agriculture.

HARVESTING

The majority of pear varieties should be harvested while still green. If pears are left on the trees until skin color has changed to yellow they will break down internally and will be unfit for consumption.

The commercial pear grower uses a device called a pressure tester to determine when to pick. However, the amateur may judge the correct stage of maturity by looking closely at the skin of the pears as the harvesting season approaches. The correct picking maturity is reached when there is a change in skin color from grass green to a lighter green. At this stage, the lenticels or "pores" of the skin appear more prominent.

The pear may be picked by gently raising the fruit from its normal position until the stalk separates from the spur. Approximate date of ripening in the B.C. Interior: for Clapps, mid-August; Bartlett, last week of August; Anjou and Sierra, last week of September.

STORAGE AND RIPENING

Bartlett and Bosc pears will ripen in a week if placed in a tightly closed plastic bag and stored in the basement at around 60° - 65° F. They do not keep much longer than a week under these conditions. In order to keep Bartlett or Bosc for any length of time, commercial storage facilities must be used and the pears held at 30° F.

Anjou and other winter pears will ripen very slowly if held in basement storage in plastic bags. To accelerate ripening of these late varieties, add one or two ripe apples to the bag. These will produce additional ethylene gas to speed the ripening process.

For additional information, contact your nearest office of the British Columbia Ministry of Agriculture and Food.

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