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PEAR HARVEST

Most pear cultivars should not be allowed to ripen on the tree. They should be picked while still firm and ripened after harvest. Tree-ripened fruits are often of poor quality because of the development of grit cells and the browning and softening of the inner flesh. Pears ripen from the inside out and waiting until the outside is completely ripe will often result in the interior of the fruit being mushy and brown. So what can home gardeners tell when to pick pears?

1. A change in the fruit ground color from a dark green to light green or yellowish green. The ground color is the "background" color of the fruit.
2. Fruit should part easily from the branch when it is lifted up and twisted.
3. Corking over of lenticels. Lenticels are the "breathing pores" of the fruit. They start out as a white to greenish white color and turn brown due to corking as the fruit nears maturity. They look like brown "specks" on the fruit.
4. Development of characteristic pear aroma and taste of sampled fruit.

Pears will actually be of higher quality if they are cooled immediately after harvest. Temperatures between 31 and 50 degrees will work with the warmer temperatures actually reducing the amount of chilling needed. Just don't go over 50 degrees. Homeowners may want to use a refrigerator, if possible. The amount of chilling required varies by cultivar from 2 days to several weeks. Pears ripen in one to three weeks after being removed from storage if held at 60 to 65 degrees F. They can then be canned or preserved. If you wish to store some for ripening later, fresh-picked fruit should be placed in cold storage at around 31degrees F and 90 percent humidity. Placing fruit in unsealed gallon plastic bags can provide the necessary humidity.

Ripen small amounts as needed by moving them to a warmer location and holding them at 60 to 65 degrees F. Ripening at too high a temperature (75 degrees F and higher) may result in the fruit breaking down without ripening.

When Are Apples Ready to Pick?

Apples mature over a long period of time depending on variety. Some varieties such as Lodi can mature in July and others as late as October or even November. Here are some guides to help you decide when to pick your apples.

Days from bloom: The number of days from bloom is a reliable guide for general maturity time, but weather conditions will have some influence. Some kinds of apples and approximate

days from bloom to maturity are Jonathan, 135, Delicious, 145, Golden Delicious, 145, and Winesap, 155 days. This process may be quicker than usual due to the hot weather this year.

Flesh color: As apples mature and starches change to sugars, the flesh changes from very light green to white. When you cut a thin slice and hold it up to the light you can see the difference.

Seed color: The seeds of most apples change from light green to brown as the fruit ripens. This indicator should be combined with other changes since it is not absolute. The flavor of the apples, the change in color of the stem and calyx basins and flesh color are important in deciding if apples are ready to harvest.

Color change: As apples mature, the skin color in areas of the stem and the calyx basin at the bottom of the apple turns from an immature green to a light-yellow color. Some apples will develop a red skin color over the majority of the fruit before they are ripe, so this is not a reliable indication of maturity.

Flavor: This is a good guide if you are familiar with the apples you have and know how they should taste. Even if you do not know the characteristic flavor of the kind of apple you have, you can still sample slices of a few apples and decide if they have a sweet flavor. If they are not ready to harvest, they will taste starchy or immature. If apples have already fallen and taste a bit starchy, store them for a period to see if they become sweeter.

Harvesting Winter Squash

Summer squash such as zucchini and scallop are harvested while immature but winter squash such as acorn, hubbard and butternut are harvested later, in the mature stage, after the rind is tough and seeds have developed. We normally think September is the time that winter squash are harvested. Harvesting too early leads to fruit that shrivels and rots. There are two main traits that help tell us when winter squash are mature: color and rind toughness. Winter squash change color as they become mature. Butternut changes from light beige to deep tan. Acorn is a deep green color but has a ground spot that changes from yellow to orange when ripe. Gray or orange is the mature color for hubbard. A hard, tough rind is another characteristic of mature winter squash. This is easily checked by trying to puncture the rind with your thumbnail or fingernail. If it easily penetrates the skin, the squash is not yet mature and will lose water through the skin -- causing the fruit to dry and shrivel. Also, immature fruit will be of low quality. The stem should also be dry enough that excessive water doesn't drip from the stem. Winter squash should be stored cool with elevated humidity. Ideal conditions would be 55 to 60 degrees F and 50 to 70 percent relative humidity. Under such conditions, acorn squash will usually last about 5 to 8 weeks, butternuts 2 to 3 months and hubbards 5 to 6 months.

Recommended Tall Fescue Cultivars

Though several cool-season grasses are grown in Kansas, tall fescue is considered the best adapted and is recommended for home lawns. The cultivar K-31 is the old standby and has been used for years. However, there is a myriad of newer cultivars that have improved color, density and a finer leaf texture. Most of these newer varieties are very close to one another in quality.

Each year the National Turfgrass Evaluation Trial rates tall fescue varieties for color, greenup, quality and texture. Quality ratings are taken once a month from March through October. The cultivars listed below received an average rating of 5.8 or above when 2012 - 2017 ratings were averaged. The highest rated cultivars were Rebounder, Michelangelo, Traverse 2, Black Tail, Reflection, GTO, Thor, Paramount, Temple, Valkyrie LS, Avenger II, Technique, 4th Millennium SRP, Rockwell, Titanium 2LS, Rowdy, Regenerate, Leonardo, Falcon V, Firebird 2, Terrano, Maestro, Grande 3, Bloodhound and Hot Rod. Those these are the highest rated there are many more that rated nearly as well and should be considered worthy of consideration. K-31 consistently rates at the bottom. Keep in mind that blends of several varieties may allow you to take advantage of differing strengths. Though K-31 may still be a good choice for large, open areas, the new cultivars will give better performance for those who desire a high-quality turf.

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