About – Early colonists brought the first pear trees to America’s eastern settlements where they thrived until crop blights proved too severe to sustain widespread cultivation. Fortunately, the pear trees brought west to Oregon and Washington by pioneers in the 1800s thrived in the unique agricultural conditions found in the Pacific Northwest. Today’s Northwest pear varieties are the same or similar to those first cultivated in France and Belgium where they were prized for their delicate flavor, buttery texture, and long storage life. Oregon and Washington produce 84% of the nation’s fresh pear crop.

Varieties

Yellow Bartlett
Available: August through January
Ripens to bright yellow. Aromatic, perfect for fresh eating. Very sweet and juicy. Excellent for canning or cooking.

Red Bartlett and Starkrimson
Available: August through January
Bright red skin when fully ripe. Same flavor, texture and use as yellow Bartletts.

Green Anjou
Available: October through June
Abundant juice and sweet flavor when ripe. They do not change color as they ripen.

Red Anjou
Available: October through May
Much the same flavor and texture as green Anjous. Remains maroon red when ripe.

Bosc
Available: September through April
Highly aromatic flavorful pear. Dense flesh makes it ideal for baking and cooking. They are brown and often russeted. They do not change color as they ripen.

Comice
Available: September through February
One of the sweetest, juiciest varieties, and often are very large. An elegant dessert pear that’s excellent with cheese. Almost no color change when ripe.

Seckel
Available: September through February
Tiny pears with ultra-sweet flavor, maroon and olive green in color. Excellent choice for children’s snacks, pickling, or as a garnish. No color change when ripened.

Forelle
Available: September through February
A smaller variety. Turns bright yellow with crimson freckling when ripe. Sweet, very juicy.

…And the newest variety, the Corcorde. It is a cross between a Comice and a British Conference pear. The Conference is a relative to the Bosc so the pear shares that familiar elongated shape with the Bosc but it is not as heavily russeted. This pear stays green when ripe so check the neck for softness.

Storing – Once they are ripened, pears will generally keep in the refrigerator for 3 to 5 days. Unripe fruit can be kept for a week or more, however, pears will not ripen properly inside the refrigerator.

Ripening – Pears do not ripen well on trees. They are harvested mature, but unripe and need to be ripened after harvest. Bartlett pears change from green to yellow as they ripen. Non-Bartlett pears (Anjou, Bosc, Comice, Seckel and Forelle) do not dramatically change color as they ripen. Because pears ripen from the inside out, the best way to check for ripeness is to “check the neck for ripeness.” To do this, gently press near the stem with your thumb. When it gives to gentle pressure it is ripe, juicy and ready to eat. If you wait until the pear is soft around the middle chances are it will be overripe. Placing pears in a paper bag will help them ripen faster. Be sure to check them daily so they don’t get overripe. You can also leave them out in a fruit bowl and enjoy their beauty as they ripen. Add apples or bananas to speed up the process.

Uses – Pears are very versatile. In addition to being served raw in almost anything, pears bake, poach, sauté, roast and grill very nicely. They can be used as an ingredient in baked goods, and can be made into preserves, jams and chutneys. Anything that can be done with an apple can be done with a pear. Browning, or oxidation, is a natural process that occurs when cut pears are exposed to oxygen. This can be slowed by using a mild solution of water and lemon juice, in to which the pears can be dipped or the solution can be brushed on the cut pears.

Nutrition – Pears are a good source of dietary fiber (a medium sized pear has 4 grams of fiber) and a good source of vitamin C, a proven anti-oxidant. Pears are also packed with Potassium (a medium sized pear has 208 mg of potassium). They contain no saturated fat, sodium or cholesterol. A medium pear has about 100 calories.

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