



Harvest of the Month

Pears



Pears are long-lived deciduous trees—some producing for over 100 years!

Botany

European pears (*Pyrus communis*) and Asian pears (*Pyrus pyrifolia*) are closely related and share many similarities. They are long-lived deciduous trees that grow best in temperate climates. Depending on the cultivar chosen, pears can do well anywhere in Sonoma County. Chill hours range from 300–800. The limiting factor closest to the coast may be insufficient summer warmth to ripen the fruit. If so, planting in a protected site or on a south-facing slope may help.



Social Science

Pear trees have been in cultivation by humans since before the Common Era; being discussed in the writings of Pliny the Elder and Theophrastus among others. The pears discussed in ancient Greek and Roman texts all came from a common ancestor native to central and eastern Europe. Another species of pear, native to southern China and northern Indochina, is responsible for the varieties we today call the Asian pear. The European pear varieties arrived in North America earlier than the Asian varieties and are still more well-known. Relatively few cultivars of European or Asian pears are widely grown worldwide. Only about 20–25 European and 10–20 Asian cultivars represent virtually all the pears of commerce. In the United States Bartlett pears account for over 50% of the pears grown. China is the top producer of pears in the world.

Pera means pear in Spanish.



Nutrition

Both European and Asian pears are a good source of fiber (including pectin), folate, vitamin C, vitamin K and Potassium.

Harvest:

While most fruits are at their most flavorful if allowed to ripen fully on the tree, European pears are an exception. A pear ripens from the core out, so if you wait to harvest until the outside is soft and colored up, the inside will be mushy and overripe. European pears must be harvested when they are still hard and green and then partially ripened off the tree. If kept at a temperature between 33 and 45 degrees Fahrenheit, they will store for a long period of time, and then ripen when put at room temperature. One sign that the fruit is mature enough to be picked and stored is if the lenticels (the small pores in the skin) change from white to brown. Asian pear varieties can be tree ripened.

Growing Tips



Planting & Trees:

Most pear varieties are self-unfruitful and require cross-pollination from another variety to set a good crop, so make sure you have the space for two trees or purchase a multi-grafted tree. Pear trees can get quite large unless on dwarfing rootstock. Depending on the rootstock your tree is grafted to, your tree will require anywhere from 100 to 300 square feet.

Tree Care:

Pear trees can be quite long-lived, some even producing for over 100 years if cared for properly. The most important part of care when your tree is young is to train the branches to grow in a more horizontal position, as pears tend to have an upright growing habit which limits the production of fruit. Pears are very susceptible to the disease fire blight.

