

*How to Harvest
Tree Fruit from the*

EDIBLE GARDEN



How to Harvest Tree Fruit from the Edible Garden

When growing cold-hardy apples, pears, and plums, timing is everything when it comes to harvesting the best quality fruit and bountiful yield from your trees. Here are a few tips to help you determine when to harvest and how to properly pick and store these common fruits.



Apples

The colour of the seeds (sometimes called pips) is a surefire way to tell if the fruit is ripe. If you cut open an apple and the seeds are white or green, the fruit is not ready. The seeds should dark brown to black in colour.

The colour of the fruit is another indicator of ripeness. Are your apples supposed to be mostly red-pink, with a hint of creamy blush? If so, then don't pick them while they are still green – they are definitely not ready yet.

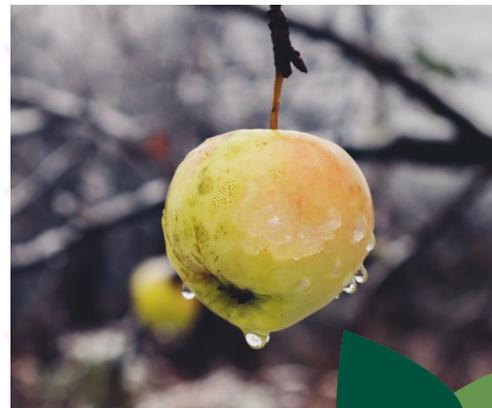
If you know which cultivar of apple you are growing, chances are you have an idea – either gathered from the plant label when you purchased it or through research – when the fruit will mature and be ready to pick. Some cold-hardy apples can be picked in August, while others aren't ready until September or even October (weather permitting). Some varieties can even withstand a light frost, while others cannot.

A taste test can be helpful. If the apples are sour and they're supposed to be nice and sweet, wait a bit longer to harvest them.

Finally, the fruit should be easy to remove from the tree. If it resists a firm pull, then it's not time to pick. Apples are usually not all ready on the tree at the same time, so if you have the luxury of staggering your picking times, do so. Most of the time, the apples growing on the inner branches will be ready later than the ones on the outer branches.

Typically, apples that are ready in August don't store as well as late-season varieties (those ready in September or October). Enjoy them fresh as soon as you can, or process them into applesauce, apple jelly, apple butter, apple cider, or use them in baking. Most baked goods can be easily frozen for later consumption. Apples are also excellent candidates for dehydration.

Late-season apples may be stored for several weeks in crates or boxes, in a cool, dark, well-ventilated location. Inspect them regularly for rot. Remember to use up blemished apples right away as they will not store well.



Plums

Plums do not always produce fruit in colder regions of Canada; although the trees may be hardy, the blooms often freeze in spring and fruit production is impacted. If your tree is fruitful, you are fortunate!

Some plums will mature early in the season (August), while others such as 'Brookgold', will be ready later in the season (late September). If you know what cultivar you have, it can help you determine when to pick.

Ripe plums are firm to the touch, but not rock hard – there should be a slight give to the skin when you grasp the fruit. (If you put your finger into the fruit, it is too ripe).

Ripe fruit should be the colour it is supposed to be, according to the cultivar. This goes for both the skin colour and the flesh colour. Look for that information on the plant label when you purchase the tree, or online. You can cut open a plum to check the flesh colour. For example, 'Patterson Pride' plum has red skin and gold flesh. Wait until it reaches these colours before picking.

Another piece of information that the plant label should offer is the size of the fruit. You can use this number to determine if the plums are ready to pick yet.

Cold-hardy plums do not have a long shelf-life, and are best used up right away. Eat them fresh, or in baked goods, or processed into jellies and jams.



Pears

There are only a few palatable (and delicious) pear cultivars available to cold-climate gardeners, and figuring out when to harvest them can be difficult. This isn't a fruit that you can allow to ripen on the plant, as its soft, juicy texture changes the longer the fruit is left. If pear fruit becomes too ripe, it will rot and you will miss the window to harvest it. Try picking them just before the skin fully changes colour. (You can check the plant label or with online sources to determine what colour fruit your cultivar should have). The fruit will be hard at this point, but that's normal.

Once picked, you can let pear fruits sit at room temperature for 2 or 3 days until they ripen. The colour should change and the fruit will soften slightly. (If it softens too much, it's overripe!)

Pears are usually harvested in August through late September or even early October, depending on the cultivar. Check the plant label for important information about when your particular tree will be ready to harvest.

Ripe pears can be kept in the refrigerator for several weeks. Do not store them at room temperature, or they will rot. Pears may be frozen via several methods. You can dry pack them by freezing individual slices on baking sheet for a few hours, then bag them for long-term storage. You can sugar pack the pears, or make a simple syrup to accompany them. You can blanch them and freeze them with water or juice. They can also be processed into delicious jelly, jam, and fruit butter.



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