

Harvesting Tree Fruits and Walnuts

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Pome fruits – (fleshy fruits with a central core, usually with up to 10 seeds enclosed in 5 seed capsules).

Pome fruits have starch reserves that reach its highest level before the fruit has completely ripened. When harvested at this stage (maturity) the starch converts to sugar as the ripening process continues in storage. Apples can be allowed to fully ripen on the tree, but pears that are tree ripened will have a coarse, mealy texture and often have core break down in storage. Therefore it is essential to harvest pears when they are mature, but not fully ripe.

Storage – An old, but still serviceable refrigerator makes a good storage unit. Ideally, temperatures should be between 32°-50°F. (Do not store apples with other fruits or potatoes as they produce ethylene gas that speed up the ripening process). Apples will keep for 1-6 months within this temperature range, and pears for 4-6 weeks. When stored dry or fresh at temperatures of 50°-70°F, apples will keep for 1-4 months, and pears 1-3 weeks.

Apples – As apples ripen the ground color (background) changes from bright green to a lighter green or yellow. Background color is the portion of the skin that does not turn red or yellow as the apple ripens. The area around the stem and the streaks in the apple are such places. The flesh of the apple changes from a greenish-white to a yellowish or softer white. The seeds of ripe apples are brown. To pick apples do not pull down. Instead, twist upward with a rotating motion. Predicted harvesting time for apples in the Coeur d'Alene/Spokane area:

Yellow Transparent – Mid-July

Lodi – Late July

McIntosh – Mid-September

Spartan – Mid to late September

Golden Delicious – First of October

Rome Beauty – Mid-October

Winesap, Newtown Pippin, Northern Spy, Mutsu, Granny Smith, and Fuji are varieties which do not mature early enough in our area for consistent production.

Pears – Color and size are good indicators for determining when pears are mature. Yellow varieties, such as Bartlett, D'Anjou, and Comice will show a slight change in skin color to a lighter shade of green when they are mature. Pears, with the exception of Seckel, should be at least 2" in diameter at the widest portion of the fruit. As with apples, the seed color will change from a pale creamy white, to light brown, and then to dark brown when ripe. Asian pears can be allowed to ripen on the tree. To pick pear, "tilt from their usual vertical hanging position to a horizontal position. Pears with the exception of Bosc, will usually detach easily.

Prunus (stone fruits) – (All have a single stone or pit inside, as opposed to the core of seeds found in pome fruits). Stone fruits have very little starch reserves and the highest level of sweetness, or sugar, is accumulated while the fruit is still on the tree. They are at their peak of quality and flavor when allowed to completely ripen on the tree. In the case of most stone fruits, when the fruit has colored well, and is beginning to soften, it is ripe for picking. A taste test will usually tell you when a given variety is ready to harvest. Stone fruits are among the earliest ripening fruits in our area, and are usually ready to begin harvesting in July. As a rule these fruits do not keep very long in storage. Apricots, peaches, nectarines, cherries, plums and prunes are common stone fruits grown in home orchards.

Storage – Apricots and cherries will keep for 3-7 days when refrigerated between 32°-50°F. Peaches will keep in this temperature range for 7-10 days. When stored dry, or fresh at temperatures between 50°-70°F apricots, cherries, and peaches will keep for 3-5 days. Plums will keep 4-6 weeks when refrigerated between 32°-50°F, and up to 2 weeks dry or fresh between 50°-70°F.

Apricots, peaches and nectarines – Check for softening by gently pressing with your fingers along the suture line, which runs from the stem to the blossom end of the fruit. Ground color break (background color change) is another good

indicator of when fruits are mature for harvest. This is when the greenish skin ground color turns to a soft straw yellow, or in the case of white flesh peaches and nectarines, the skin turns to a cream color.

Cherries- are ripe when they turn bright, or deep red, depending on the cultivar. Others, such as Stark gold are a rich, golden color when ripe.

Plums and prunes – are ripe when the flesh turns from yellow-green to amber.

Note -For any fruit rely on the number of days from flowering to harvest. Harvesting time may vary slightly from season to season depending on weather, and other climatic condition.

Harvesting and Drying Walnuts* – Walnuts are mature as soon as the husk can be easily separated from the nut. However, they usually are not harvested until after the fall rains have cracked the husk to the point of letting the nut fall to the ground. If the wind caused the nuts to fall to the ground before the hulls have cracked leave them on the ground until the hulls are loose. The nuts should be ready for removal after a week or two. This is especially true of Carpathian varieties (English walnuts). Black walnut husks may not rot entirely and you may have to give them a good whack with a hammer.

Harvest husk free walnuts as soon as possible after they drop. Kernels of nuts that are allowed to remain on wet ground rapidly become discolored. Harvested un-dried nuts left in the sack for a day or so may heat and become moldy. Start the drying process within 24 hours of harvest. Nuts are usually dried in the shell, but you can save a considerable amount of drying time and you will need less heat if you shell the nuts before drying.

The best drying temperatures are between 95°-105°F. Air circulation is vital, so it is desirable to dry the nuts on a screen-bottomed tray, in an onion sack, or in any other container that will permit free air passage. You can dry small lots in the warm air stream above a furnace or radiator, as long as the temperature does not exceed 105°F. This may require 3-4 days. If temperature exceeds 110°F the quality of the nuts will be impaired. The walnuts will have a roasted taste and can become rancid in storage.

Wash and dry the nuts before drying. The walnuts will be crisp at first, and then they will become soft and rubbery as they dry. When nuts are finally dry they will be crisp again. If nuts are not completely dry they will quickly mold. Walnuts will keep up to a year if they are kept in a cool, dry place.

*Adapted from PNW 235, "Growing Walnuts in the Northwest"