

Pear Primer

Pears are versatile fall and wintertime fruit. That is because of all the different types of pears and the unique flavors and textures each one offers. Now is the time to get to know this tasty fruit better.

Varieties

There are many pear varieties, with intriguing differences in shape and color. Here are the most popular and commonly bought varieties:

Anjou pears have a rounded shape and smooth, thin yellow-green or red skin. Anjou pears are best used raw and cooked because of their tangy flavor and firm texture.

When ripe, *Bartlett* pears are shaped like a bell and turn from green to yellow. A red variety is grown, too. A Bartlett's juicy sweetness and buttery texture make it a delicious pear for eating fresh.

Bosc pears have bronze-toned skin with sloping, long necks. They are crunchy and firm. Bosc pears are best used in pies, tarts, chutneys, compotes, and poaching due to its nutty-sweet flavor and crisp texture.

Comice pears are prized as eating pears because of their buttery texture and flavor. They have yellow-green freckled skin with a blush of red and a squat, round shape with a short neck.

Nutrition

Nutrient-dense pears offer more nutrients for fewer calories, plus no sodium, fat, or cholesterol. A medium pear is about 100 calories. Pears are an excellent fiber source that helps manage blood sugar levels and satiety. According to the USDA, pears are a good source of vitamin C and also contain potassium, vitamin K, copper, magnesium, and B vitamins. That's a lot of nutrition in one sweet and juicy package!

How to Buy

Pears are a unique fruit because they ripen best *after* being picked, not on the tree, with only a few varieties changing color to let you know when they are ready. Pears are harvested when they are mature but not yet ripe, and if left at room temperature, they slowly reach maturity as they ripen from the inside out.

So, how can you tell when a pear is ripened to juicy sweet perfection? While Bartlett's skin color brightens as they ripen, most varieties of pears show little color change. The best way to tell the ripeness of non-Bartlett pears is to gently press on the neck of the pear with your thumb. If it gives a little to the pressure, it is ripe.

Here is what you need to do to ripen your pears:

- Leave unripe, firm pears at room temperature.

- Check the pears daily by gently putting pressure on the neck or stem end with your thumb. If it yields to pressure, it is ripe and ready to eat!
- Once the pear is ripe, you will want to slow the ripening process by placing it in the refrigerator. Pears will keep for 3 to 5 days.

Wash Before Eating

Make sure to thoroughly wash pears before eating or preparing. Wash fruit even if you plan on peeling it.

Prevent Browning

Like most fruits, once pears are cut or peeled, they will brown. To keep the pears looking appetizing, dip them in a solution of 50% water and 50% lemon juice.

Uses

Pears are a very versatile fruit. Not only can they be served raw, but they can also be baked, poached, sauteed, roasted, and grilled. Anything you may do with an apple can be done with a pear!

The pears that are not optimal for cooking are Bartlett and Comice. When cooked, they may over-soften, and their flavor may diminish.

Overripe pears are still delicious, just not ideal for serving whole or sliced. Use them in smoothies, sauces, or as a tasty thickening agent for soups, stocks, or stews.

It is a fabulous time of year for pears! Incorporate the season's harvest of pears into your meals.

(Sources: <https://www.eatright.org>; <https://fdc.nal.usda.gov>; <https://usapears.org>;))