



## **Pest Corner**

October, 2008

### **Preventing Rot While Storing Home-Grown Fruit**

Adapted by Cecilia from information published by Don Tapio, Grays Harbor County Extension Agent.

Start by picking apples and pears at the appropriate time for harvesting.

#### **Apples**

Pick them when the fruit is fully mature, but before it becomes overripe. When fruit ripens, there are changes in the seeds, in the abscission, in the color, and in the taste of the fruit.

**Seeds:** In later ripening varieties like King, the seeds become brown when the fruit is ripe, but with early-season apples, they may be ready to eat before the seeds turn brown.

**Abscission:** A hormone called ethylene is released by the fruit. This hormone acts on certain cells (called the abscission layer) that separate the fruit stem from the spur on which it grows. As fruit ripens, the cells in the abscission layer weaken causing the fruit to fall from the tree. When a few good apples drop to the ground, the apples on the tree are nearly mature. Mature apples are easily separated from the tree. *Do not pull the apple down, but twist it upward with a rotating motion.*

**Color:** Look at the outer and under skin. Apples may be yellow, red, green, or combinations of these colors at maturity. When the green has almost completely given way to yellow, a yellow variety is mature. With red blush or striped apples, the area where there is no red color usually changes from green to yellowish at maturity. This does not help with the new red strains, which are red all over long before maturity. The change of flesh color (between the skin and core) from greenish to white is also a sign of maturity.

**Taste:** When an apple becomes lightly softer and tastes sweet and juicy, it is mature.

## Pears

There are two basic categories. “Fall pears” do not need a storage period before they are ready to eat. But “winter pears” will not mature properly unless they are given a resting period in cold storage immediately after picking. Fall pear varieties include Bartlett, Clapp Favorite, and Orca. Those that ripen later, such as Bosc, Comice, and Highland are winter pears.

**Color:** Both “Fall and Winter pears” still look “green” at the time they are ready to pick. If you wait to pick your pears until they look ripe, with yellow skin color, they will be soft and soon rot in storage. Also consider that most pears ripen from the inside out. If left on the tree to ripen, many varieties will be brown at the core—in other words; they are overripe in the middle. This is variety dependent, but is particularly common in most fall pears.

**Abscission:** When pears are ripe, the stems will easily separate from the spur (at the abscission layer) when the fruit is lifted. If you have to tug or pull to get the pear off, it usually is not ready. After picking, fall pears can be kept on a shelf at room temperature until ready to eat—when yellow color develops and the fruit begins to soften. Fall pears can be stored but usually do not keep for more than 4 to 6 weeks.

Winter pears should be put into some kind of cold storage (between 33 and 40 degrees Fahrenheit) for at least three weeks. After that period, you can start to bring out the fruit as needed to soften up at room temperature. At first it may take 5 to 9 days before pears are ready to eat; later on a couple of days at room temperature may be long enough.

**Cooling and Ventilation:** For long term storage of any fruit, cooling and ventilation are critical. Cooling slows down the fruit respiration, which slows down senescence. Ventilation keeps ethylene and carbon dioxide from building up to damaging levels. Some people use old refrigerators set aside just for keeping fruit. Another option is to choose an area with low heat and that does not freeze.

**Packing:** Fruit can be packed in ordinary boxes lined with newspaper or other padding. Some people use perforated plastic liner bags to prevent fruit from drying and shriveling in long storage. Plastic bags must have holes for ventilation to avoid build-up of ethylene (the gas that speeds up ripening and shortens storage life). Also prevent excess moisture as it does contribute to rot.

**Check the fruit:** Monitor your fruit to avoid rotten ones spoiling the whole barrel.

If picked at the proper time, and given good storage, many of our best apples and pears can be enjoyed for months after the harvest season is over.

Pest Corner is the title of a series of gardening articles which appears in the Grays Harbor and Pacific Counties Master Gardener Newsletter.