

Harvesting Apples and Pears

With the recent abnormally cool weather, I have received many phone calls on whether it is possible to harvest apples and some other fruit when they are not ripe. Generally, the answer is no. I would suggest leaving the fruit on the tree, for this will maximize the chances the fruit will ripen. For many in Cache Valley, unfortunately, ripening dates for apples seems to be two to three weeks behind normal. However, in conversation with local commercial growers, they feel that temperatures around 26-27 degrees Fahrenheit are the critical point where apples will be damaged by cold. Freezing temperatures above this threshold are usually fine.

In addition, I am asked if there is sufficient time left in the season that it will ripen on the tree. I honestly wish I knew. The best that can be done is to wait and see.

Depending on how early unripe fruit is harvested, they will generally just rot or they will never achieve the quality they could have if left on the tree. However, if the apples are almost ripe and have an acceptable flavor, you may be able to pick and process them. The prematurely picked fruit usually do not store for any length of time. The same holds true for grapes, and winter squash.

Conversely, although most European pears have already been picked, they should be harvested when they are physiologically mature but not fully ripe. This occurs when some pears start to fall from the tree and the fruit can be easily removed without breaking branches. Pears then should be allowed to sit in a cool room for one to two weeks. They will usually bring out the traditional pear flavor. When pears are allowed to ripen fully on the tree, they develop an excessively “sandy” or grainy texture which makes them less desirable to eat. Keep in mind that winter pears usually need to be stored at low temperatures for at least a month before being placed in a cool room to ripen.

Depending on the variety, pears and apples that ripen in late September and October are often stored for weeks to months. Apples such as Fuji, Gala, Cameo and Honeycrisp store well. However, both Golden and Red Delicious do not. To maximize the amount of time you can maintain good quality, store the fruit between 30 and 40 degrees Fahrenheit. The fruit should be periodically checked, because one rotten apple (or pear) really will spoil the bunch. Refrigerators are ideal for storage, but unheated rooms are acceptable.

Registration for the Master Gardener course is also occurring. The course offers comprehensive training in areas of horticulture such as gardening, fruit production, landscape plant selection and general landscaping. However, the Master Gardener organization is volunteer oriented and class members are encouraged to complete service hours in order to obtain the Master Gardener Certification. For more information, call 435-752-6263 or access the following webpage:

www.extension.usu.edu/cache/horticulture.