

# And a partridge in a pear tree

Perhaps one of the reasons a partridge in a pear tree was given, was that December is National Pear Month!

While many fruits are out of season during the winter months, pears are available nearly year-round, which makes them a great addition to any meal. They come in a variety of shapes, sizes and skin colors which include green, golden, yellow and red. Pears can be eaten raw or cooked and are great as a quick snack, chopped and added to fruit salads. Additionally, they can also be baked, broiled or grilled.

Regarding nutrition and health, pears are an excellent source of dietary fiber. A medium-sized pear has 24 percent of the recommended daily allowance. Pears also have potassium; a medium-sized pear has about 190 milligrams of potassium. They have no saturated fat, sodium, or cholesterol and are a good source of vitamin C. A medium pear has about 100 calories.

So when shopping for pears how do you know when a pear is ripe? Well, Bartlett pears change from green to yellow as they ripen. Non-Bartlett pears (Anjou, Bosc, Comice, Concorde, Seckel and Forelle) do not drastically change color

when ripening. Pears ripen from the inside out, so check for ripeness by “checking the neck.” Gently press near the stem with your thumb. When it gives to gentle pressure it is ripe and ready to eat. When the pear is soft around the middle it is overripe.

Choose pears that are firm to the touch and free from bruises and blemishes. If pears are ripe, they can be used immediately or refrigerated to slow down further ripening. If pears need to ripen, leave them out at room temperature for 7 to 10 days. Putting pears in a paper bag will help them ripen faster, but remember to check them daily so they don’t get overripe.

In regard to cleaning and preparing, wash pears under running water before eating. When pears are cut up for dishes, browning is a natural process that occurs when they are exposed to the air. A mild solution of half water and half lemon juice can be brushed on cut pears to slow this process. Lightly poaching pears will also



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slow the browning process and is a good way to prepare them for use in salads.

Firmer varieties such as Bosc, Anjou, or Concorde are best for poaching, baking, and grilling. They have denser flesh, hold their shape better, and keep their flavor. Pears not ideal for heating are Yellow Bartlett, Red Bartlett, Starkrimson, and Comice, as their flavor and texture are at best when ripe and fresh. When heated, the consistency may over soften and have reduced flavor.

Great additions to meals and side dishes; pears are perfect for snacks, as salad toppings, additions to ice cream or yogurt, and as a side dish. Pears are also great baked, poached, sautéed, roasted, or grilled. They can be used in baked goods and made into preserves, jams, and chutneys. Overripe pears are still tasty, just not great for serving whole or sliced. They can be used in smoothies, sauces, or as a thickening agent for soups, stocks or stews.

So, be sure to enjoy some pears this holiday season!

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