

# Pears are in season; get your jars ready

Driving down the rural roads of Rusk County this time of the year it is easy to spot pear trees. If fortunate enough to have one of these trees then this is a good time to make use of the fruit.

Pears 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 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, sauteed, 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.

Remember, the holidays are just around the corner and pear preserves might be a perfect gift.

For other food preserva-



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tion recipes, please contact the Rusk County Extension Office at 903-657-0376.

## Pear Preserves

(about 5 half-pint jars)

1 ½ cup sugar 1 ½ cups sugar

2 ½ cups water 1 thinly sliced lemon

6 medium cored, pared, hard ripe pears, cut in halves

or quarters (about 2 pounds)

Combine 1 ½ cups sugar with the 2 ½ cups water; cook rapidly for 2 minutes. Add pears and boil gently for 15 minutes. Add remaining sugar and lemon stirring until sugar dissolves. Cook rapidly until fruit is clear, about 25 minutes. Cover and let stand 12 to 24 hours in refrigerator.

Sterilize canning jars. Heat fruit and syrup to boiling. Pack fruit into hot jars, leaving ¼-inch head space. Cook syrup 3 to 5 minutes or longer if to thin. Pour hot syrup over fruit, leaving ¼-inch head space. Wipe jar rims and adjust lids. Process 5 minutes in a Boiling Water Bath.

NOTE: Small pears may be preserved whole with stem intact; peel pears and wash stem well.

For best flavor, Kieffer pear preserves should be stored in a cool, dry place from 3 to 5 weeks after processing before using. A piece of preserved ginger may be added to each jar.

For more information concerning the 4-H program or to register for the new 4-H year, please contact or stop by the Rusk County Extension Office, 113 East Fordall Street, Henderson at 903-657-0376.

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