

My absolute favorite part of fall is the fresh fruit. In my opinion, there is nothing better than taste of a fresh and in season apple, peach, or pear. The tricky part is knowing when to pick them so that they are at peak ripeness and taste. If you harvest too soon, the fruit are sour and hard, but too late and apples will have a mealy texture and pears will be gritty.

First, apples. There are many cultivars of apple that are available on the markets, and knowing that is going to be the first step in identifying when the apple will be ripe. Apple varieties can vary when they are ripe from midsummer to late fall. All apples have a base color, this is called the ground color. It is the main color of the apple, not including any reddening from sun exposure or patches of green. In red apples, the ground color will lighten from green to more yellow in color. In yellow apples, the color will turn to a gold.

There are two main types of pears, European and Asian. European pears are those that look like the classic 'Bartlett' pears that we generally think of when we think of pears, and are more common than the Asian type. Because European pears start their ripening process on the inside, they should not be allowed to completely ripen on the tree, as some of the cells within the fruit will harden, giving it a gritty texture. These cells are called stone cells. Much like apples, pears have a ground color. The ground color of European pears should change to a yellow-green. The spots on the skin of the fruit should also change color white to brown. Like most fruit, they should easily break off from the branch of the tree when twisted. European pears will still be firm when harvested and allowed to soften in a cool, well ventilated space. Asian pears are different from European in that they can be allowed to ripen on the tree. They also tend to be a rounder shape and different texture than the European pear.

Deciding if peaches are ripe enough to harvest is very similar to apples and pears. The ground color should change to yellow from green. Again, this varies from cultivar to cultivar. Peaches can also be sampled for taste. Just remember that after harvest, peaches will not gain any more sugar because they are disconnected from the branch and their source of sugar.

If you have had any difficulties with disease this year, there are a few things to try to lower the chance of disease for the next year. Sanitation is one of the most important practices in lowering disease. This year with all of the moisture that we have had, fungal diseases have ran rampant. By cleaning up leaves and fallen fruit and getting them away from the tree, you reduce the risk that the plant will be re-infected the next year by fungal spores that survive the winter in dead plant material. Mummified fruit that are still hanging on the tree can also harbor fungal spores and should be removed.

Fruit may be the best part of fall, but it is very important to know when to pick fruit for peak ripeness. If the fruit is left on the tree too long, it can rot and be gritty, but too soon and the fruit are sour. On the fruit listed today, the ground color will change to a lighter yellow or green. European pears will also have brown dots on the skin instead of white. If you have any questions feel free to contact me at the Buffalo County Extension Office, at 308-236-1235, or mearnest2@unl.edu

If you enjoy my column, like gardening, or learning about plants, I'd like to invite you to an informational meeting for the Extension Master Gardener program on November 10 from 2-3. The Master Gardener program is a volunteer program that helps educate the public about Horticulture, and make a difference through the volunteer hours they put in. Come learn more about the program and be able to ask questions! Please RSVP through the contact information listed above. See you soon!

-Miranda