

# Pears and Oriental Pears

A fine addition to any garden, the pear tree will bear a bounty of fruit for the gardener. Pears have an earlier flowering period than other fruit trees, so the risk of damage by a late frost is greater, so be sure to select a sheltered site in cold areas. Asian, or Oriental pears have a smooth round shape and crisp, juicy sweet flesh. Sometimes these unique pears are called “Apple Pears”.

## WHICH PEAR TREE TO GROW?

Both European and Oriental pears are available at GARDENWORKS. Please ask a nursery staff member for details regarding suitable cultivars for your needs, including pollination.

Pears need another type of pear present to produce fruit. Two different pear trees that flower relatively at the same time would make good pollination partners. (Note - Bartlett or Bosc will also pollinate any of the Asian pears.)

## LOCATION

Pears thrive on sunny, warm sites sheltered from early frost. They prefer well-drained soils but will tolerate soils rich in clay. A planting distance of 9m (30') for standard sized trees and 6m (20') for semi-dwarf trees is generally recommended. If space is limited, you may want to consider a multi-variety tree, where 3 or 4 suitable pear types are grafted onto one tree to help in pollination.

## PLANTING

Pear trees may be planted in the fall or early spring. Fall is considered the best time to plant and spring the second. Availability of trees is generally better during spring.

When planting, make sure that the planting hole is large enough to accommodate the tree roots by digging the hole at least twice as wide as the container or rootball. Incorporate a handful

(or a cupful) of bone meal to the bottom of the hole before setting the tree down. To plant a tree that has been growing in a plastic container — gently remove the plant from the container and massage the roots with your hands before placing the root ball in to the hole.

To plant a tree that has been growing in a fibre pot — soak the pot (with the tree) in a bucket of water for 4 hours or more. Cut off the top rim of the pot to expose the first inch of soil before planting. Do not remove the pot. Back-fill with soil.

To encourage fast and healthy root growth, fertilize with GARDENWORKS. Transplant Fertilizer 5-15-5. The newly planted tree should be watered regularly for the next few months to ensure success. Do not fertilize your new pear tree again until the following spring.

## FERTILIZING

The young pear tree should be growing approximately 40cm (15”) annually. To encourage this growth, work in plenty of good garden compost and a balanced fertilizer. GARDENWORKS. 4-20-20 Fruit and Berry Food is great for encouraging strong growth and high yields. Avoid excessive use of high nitrogen fertilizers (such as manure) as this will cause soft growth, which is susceptible to attack by insects and disease.

## PRUNING AND TRAINING

Pears have a pyramidal shape, while apples and other fruit trees are more rounded in their growth. The central leader on a pear tree needs to be maintained, and should never be eliminated.

For newly planted trees (trees with hardly any side branching), cut back to a height of 75cm (30") and eliminate all side shoots. If the tree has some side branching, cut these back to about 15cm (6") from the main stem.

For older trees, prune to keep the tree well balanced. Maintain the central-leader by cutting the central shoot by 1/3 or 1/2 every year. Lateral branches should be spread outwards by using wood or wire spreaders or by tying them down. Keep these branches at an angle of approximately 45 degree from the vertical to encourage early bearing. Prune pears during the dormant season. February is best.

As the tree matures and begin to bear fruit, prune by removing branches from the centre of the tree to allow light and air to enter freely. Where branches are crowded, thin them out by removing some branches completely. (Refer to our "Pruning Know-How" handout for more information.)

## THINNING

On many pear varieties, the fruit sets very heavily. When there is too much fruit on one tree, quality may be low, and the health of the plant may be at risk. In June, pears should be thinned by removing some of the small fruitlets, so that there is an average spacing of 20cm (8") between fruits.

## HARVESTING

European pear varieties should be harvested while still green and at least 5cm (2") in diameter. If pears are left on the trees until the skin colour has changed to yellow, the flesh will be mealy and too soft for consumption. Asian pears will ripen well on the tree.

To pick, gently raise the fruit from its normal position until the stalk easily separates from the branch. Be careful not to tear fruit as it comes away from the branch.

## STORING AND RIPENING

After pears have been picked, they should be packed together in boxes and placed in a dark, cool room (near freezing, but not below). Pears do not fully ripen during storage. They should be placed at room temperature for a day or two before being consumed. If fruit is kept in storage for too long, the core will begin to break down by forming brown watery areas, so check your pears often!

## PEAR PESTS AND DISEASES

As with any disease or pest, be certain to bring by a sample from your tree for us to inspect. If caught early enough, many fruit tree problems can be solved very quickly. Here are the three most common problems in pear trees..

### FIRE BLIGHT

causes flowers and leaves near the tips of branches will suddenly wilt, turn brown or black, as if scorched by fire. As soon as blight is noticed, remove infected twigs and branches to at least 25cm (10") below the infected area. After each cut, sterilize the tools with rubbing alcohol. As a preventative measure, avoid pruning during the flowering period and wet weather. Oriental pears are more resistant to fireblight than European pears.

### PEAR PSYLLA

a tiny insect, weakens the tree by sucking out vital sap, and transmits diseases. Watch for yellow leaves, sudden leaf drop, low tree vigour, and scarred and malformed fruits. Pear psylla can be controlled in winter with dormant oil sprays. Be certain to remove all fallen leaves.

### CODLING MOTH

is the prime cause of pear fruit disfiguration. Watch for holes and tunnels through the fruits, and brown mounds of insect droppings nearby. Codling moths can be controlled by placing sticky bands around the trunks of trees to catch larvae.

