

When is my fruit ready to pick?

Apples

Knowing when fruit is ripe and ready to be picked can be a challenge. Flavor and texture are important indicators, but are also quite subjective. One of the best indicators of ripeness is the color of the seeds inside an apple. As the fruit ripens, the seed will turn from a near white color to tan, sometimes streaked brown, to full brown - sometimes almost black.

The redness of an apple is not a good indicator of its ripeness. When assessing maturity of apples, look for a change in the background color, the part of the skin not covered with red pigment. When the background color begins to change from green to a greenish yellow color, the apple is starting to ripen. Among common midwest apple varieties, only “North-western Greening” is truly green at harvest. All other apples should have a yellowish background color when fully ripened. This happens as the starch is converted to sugar in the fruit.

Pick a few apples that appear to be ripe and taste them to be sure they are at the maturity stage you prefer. As apples ripen, starch in the flesh is converted to sugar. An unripe apple will be starchy and leave a sticky film on your teeth. A ripe apple may still be tart, but it should also be sweet and have developed aromatic flavors.

Pears

Pears should not completely ripen on the tree. Fruit that ripens on the tree ends up gritty and unpleasant. Instead, fruit is picked at a “physiologically mature” stage and then is ripened indoors. However, fruit should not be picked too early either.

A pear fruit is ready to harvest when:

- The skin color turns from dark green to a lighter yellowish green
- The lenticels (dots) change from white to brown (not in all varieties)
- The skin develops a smoother, waxy look and feel

Pears ripen fully when allowed to sit at room temperature for a few days. When the fruit turns a more golden color and the flesh at the stem end yields to thumb pressure, the fruit is ready to eat.

When to set a harvest date?

Please contact Glean Milwaukee at least 2 weeks before you think the fruit may be ripe. Many apple tree owners call too early- sometimes weeks or months before the apples are ripe. Apple trees tend to drop a lot of apples early, so try to stick to the ripeness indicators provided in this guide. Pear tree owners tend to call Glean Milwaukee too late, when the pears are already overripe on the tree.



Apple seed color is a reliable indicator of fruit ripeness. The dark brown seeds of this apple show that it is ripe.



The yellowish skin color of these pears indicate that they may be ready for harvest.

(Photo courtesy Ed Bacchus, Flickr user)

*Excerpts from University of
Minnesota Extension publications:
“Apples and Pears in Minnesota Home Gardens”
“Stone Fruits for Minnesota Gardens”*