

Best Pears for the Western Pacific Northwest

Joseph Postman, Bob Norton, Jacky King, Gary Moulton, Sam Benowitz and Bill Davis

A “favorite pears” panel held at the Northwest Washington Research and Extension Center, Mount Vernon, WA in March 2017. Compiled by Kristan Johnson, revised and expanded by J. Postman in January 2018. Number following the pear name indicates the number of panelist votes.

European Pears

Comice (Doyenne du Comice) (5) – midseason: The queen of dessert pears. Fruit large, often with red blush; flesh sweet, melting, very juicy, aromatic, quite free of grit. A temperamental variety to grow, slow in coming into bearing and reaches perfection only under limited soil and climate conditions. Ripens best if given 3 weeks in storage after harvest. Stores well until December. Originated in France in 1849.

Conference (4) – mid to late September: A quality standard for midseason pears in Western Europe. Fruit medium to large, long pyriform; skin smooth, green, partially russeted; flesh pale, tender, melting, very juicy, and sweet. Reliable production, good storage, keeps until January or February. Some scab resistance. Originated in England in 1846

Orcas (4) – late August: Fruit large, attractive, uniform, slightly lumpy, yellow with red-orange blush. Mild, sweet flavor, excellent for canning or drying. Tree is vigorous and resistant to scab. Discovered on Orcas Island, WA in 1966.

Rescue (4) – August: Fruit large, yellow with attractive reddish blush. Has a mild sweet flavor with melting flesh. Good for fresh use or canning. Good production with little scab. Trees bear well, though not highly vigorous. Rescued near Vancouver, B.C. in 1976 before the original tree was destroyed.

Seckel (4) – mid September: Small fruit with excellent, spicy flavor and dull red color. Not for long storage. Tree moderately vigorous and productive. Susceptible to scab but somewhat resistant to fire blight. A historic American variety discovered near Philadelphia, PA in 1760.

Bartlett (3) – late August: The most widely grown pear in the world. Very good fruit quality with typical “pear” shape. Tree is productive and begins bearing at a young age. Susceptible to scab. Originated in England in 1765.

Stuttgarter-Geishirtle (=Zuckerbirne) (3) – early August: Fruit small with red blush. Can be eaten ripe from the tree. Highly productive, excellent crunchy flavor. Tree not highly vigorous. Will fit in smaller yards.

Blake’s Pride (2) – late August: Fruit moderate size with attractive russeted skin; flesh firm and flavorful. Stores until early November. Tree healthy, vigorous, fire blight resistant. Introduced by USDA Agricultural Research Service in 2002.

Bosc (2) – late September to October: Good late-season dessert pear. Fruit elongated, usually russeted; flesh firm and crisp with rich buttery flavor and pleasant aroma. Good for baking or poaching. Needs a few weeks of cold storage for best ripening. Can be stored until January. Tree is productive, somewhat susceptible to scab.

Harrow Delight (2) – early September: Fruit medium size, with light red blush; flesh flavorful, smooth texture similar to Bartlett. Tree productive, resistant to fire blight and scab. Developed in Ontario, Canada.

Kalle (=Red Clapp Favorite) (2) – August: Red sport of Clapp Favorite. Fruit uniform in size with attractive even red skin color, mild sweet flavor. Tree is vigorous and productive. Nice in a market display with green pears. Very susceptible to scab.

Sirrine (2) – mid September: Excellent fruit quality, but tree can be sprawling, difficult to manage and not very productive.

Atlantic Queen (2) – mid September: Very large, yellow-green fruit up to 1.5 pounds each. Fruit is aromatic with good flavor and buttery texture. Tree is productive, even under adverse growing conditions, and generally disease resistant.

Abate Fetel (1) – mid season: excellent fruit quality, long banana-shaped fruit, yellowish-green with slight russet; flesh white, slightly crisp, honey-like flavor. Favorite pear in Italy. Susceptible to scab and fire blight.

Bella di Giugno (=Mirandino Rosso) (1) – late June: very early, small Italian pear with rich, buttery flavor. Sturdy, easy to grow tree, susceptible to scab.

Concorde (1) – September: Good keeper; firm yet juicy texture, sweet and aromatic, vanilla-like flavor. A cross of Conference x Comice from England. Precocious and high yielding.

Gem (1) – late August – September: a recent USDA Agricultural Research Service introduction. Attractive, uniform-shaped fruit, hang well on tree; nice balanced flavor. High yielding, good storage, fire blight resistant.

Highland (1) – late September – October: Fruit yellow with light russet; flesh melting, juicy, sweet, fruity flavor. Ripens several weeks after Bartlett and keeps well in storage; susceptible to fire blight.

White Doyenne (1) – September: Fruit medium size with smooth, waxy skin. Flesh buttery, moderately juicy, aromatic “like a fine, rich, buttery chardonnay, sweet yet tart, with musky undertones and a strong perfume.”

Perry Pear

Hendre Huffcap (1) late September: Consistent bearing, makes a very good hard cider. Fruit is small and yellow/green, high in acids and low in tannins.

Asian Pears

Hosui (1) mid-season, ripens with Chojuro: Large, golden russeted fruit is sweet, crisp and juicy. Russeted skin resists blemishes. Tree is rather vigorous and willowy. Sister varieties ‘Kosui’ and ‘Shinsui’ are also excellent.

Kikusui (1) early September: round, yellow pears are sweet and juicy. Trees are productive even when young. Resistant to fire blight.

Kosui (1) August: Yellow-bronze russet, fruit is similar to but smaller than Hosui. One of the best flavored Asian pears, fruit must be thinned for good size.

Mishirasu (1) late September: HUGE fruit! Rough, brown russet; crisp and crunchy, good flavor.

Shinsui (1) mid-August: Fruit medium size, yellow-brown russet; flesh crisp, juicy, very sweet, fine texture. Excellent eating quality.