

Asian Pears

By
Scott Hininger
University of Wyoming Extension
Sheridan County
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Pears originated in the same general area of the world as did apples, in the Near East and Asia Minor. Gardeners have been growing pears for many centuries. The one thing I like about the Asian type pears is the round shape and crunchy apple texture with the flavor of a pear. These are not the juicy run down your arm type of pear (nothing wrong with that).

Most people in Wyoming have not planted pears, but they are more adapted and will generally grow where most apples will grow. The USDA zone rating for most pears is 5 or higher, but I would not let that deter you from trying pears. There are several varieties of pears particularly the Asian types that are a zone 4 rating. I think the main three drawbacks to fruit production in Wyoming is the dry winters, the early frosts when things are trying to bloom too early, and the abrupt cold temperatures in the fall before trees have had a chance to harden off.

The other thing I have noticed on most Asian types versus European types is the complexity of flavors that can include; butterscotch, brandy, apricot and some light fruity wine undertones. The other important trait of Asian pears is to let them ripen on the tree, where the European types should be picked when they just maturing and then let ripen indoors. I think the Asian types will generally keep longer than European types. If stored at 34 degrees with a fair amount of humidity they can store for a good 5 months. This is a real plus for those of us who like to eat fresh fruit.

However as with most any fruit they can be put up in canning, jelly, dried, or frozen. They can also be juiced and the bakery recipes are quite extensive. When looking for pears there are tables sometimes available that describes the grittiness of the pears. This grittiness is caused by stone cells and there are tables available that have most varieties scaled from 1 to 9 with 9 being the least gritty and 1 being sand like. I would say anything over 5 would be a good choice.

As with most fruit trees a second pollinator is advised sometimes, and also look for a fire blight resistant variety. Pear trees prefer a well-drained soil with a neutral or slightly acidic pH. However I have found they will do ok in our heavy clay soils with a 7.5 pH. This may slow down the growth or cause some nutrient deficiencies. Pears are also prone to boron deficiencies. Do not over fertilize with nitrogen as this may increase fire blight.

Pear trees generally should be pruned less than apples and a central leader system seems to work best. With Asian types they can tend to over produce so when the fruit is the size of

cherries start thinning the cluster to one. This will keep the tree from overbearing and stressing the tree, the fruit will be larger and you will not break so many branches.

There are several good varieties of Asian pears which will work in Wyoming from the softball size 'Large Korean' to the baseball size 'New Century'. As you guessed Asian pears are also round like apples. Look for later blooming varieties and ones that ripen by the end of September. Pears need a cooling period to produce (cool nights and warm days) which we generally have, however fruit quality can be compromised when the night time temperatures drop into the 40's at night and or the daytime temperatures get too high before they have matured.

So if you are looking to diversify your backyard fruit growing experience try Asian Pears.

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