

Eat Pears!

Another wonderful autumn treat, pears come in a range of flavours and textures and can be enjoyed in many different ways (other than as a delicious snack on their own). Exceptional when poached with red wine and vanilla, they are also stunning with chocolate as in the classic French dessert *Poires Belle Hélène*. Alternatively try them in salads or add to an after-dinner cheese board; they go particularly well with Pecorino or Roquefort.

HISTORY - The cultivation of pears goes back some 4,000 years. It is likely that they originated in the Caucasus region from where they spread west to Europe and east to Asia.

In Ancient times the pear was considered superior to the apple and outnumbered it in varieties grown. By 300 B.C. techniques such as grafting and cross-pollination of pears were known in Greece.

The Domesday Book of 1086 refers to pear trees as boundary markers in England, suggesting their cultivation at this time. The first important English pear, the *Wardon* (a cooking pear mentioned in Shakespeare's work) was introduced by Cistercian monks at Wardon in Bedfordshire.

Pear varieties were greatly improved during the eighteenth century, largely by horticulturalists in France and Belgium. The number of varieties growing in Britain rose from 64 in 1640 to over 700 by the late nineteenth century.

Today the Conference pear accounts for well over 90% of commercial production in this country. Imported pears account for around 80% of consumption.

BIOLOGY - Like its cousin the apple, the pear (*Pyrus communis* in Europe) is a member of the rose family. Botanically speaking a pear is a type of *pome* - a false fruit in which five carpels (the true fruit) form a core containing the seeds.

BUYING - Pears are usually picked when slightly under-ripe and they improve in texture and flavour after picking. Ripe pears have an inviting fragrance and yield to gentle pressure at the stem end but slightly firmer pears are usually preferable for use in cooking.

Choose pears that are undamaged and well-coloured. Russeting (a matt brown speckling on the surface) is normal on many pears.

COOKING - Scan the code below to view the recipe for '*Pear Trifle*' on the seasonal recipes blog.



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