

A Perfect Pear
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UCCE El Dorado County Master Food Preservers
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This beautiful September morning could not get any better. First, the dreaded yard work turned out to be easy and quickly finished. Then, the hair salon had exactly the right time open for an hour of beauty. Finally, a call from a friend resulted in plans for an excursion to a pear orchard for an all-you-can pick day next week.

Pears come in all types, from everyday Bartlett's to Oriental Hybrids, with over 3,000 different varieties. Only about 20 of these make it to commercial outlets, although many people enjoy home-grown pears. Pears grow quite well in this area, but even better in Washington State, where about half the nation's pear crop originates. Easy to grow, pear trees require cross pollination, so at the minimum two varieties must be planted to ensure fruit, which will begin to appear within 4-8 years.

How to pick the perfect pear? The CDC says "Selecting them can be easy if you consider the following: avoid pears with bruises or cuts and dark brown colors; purchase pears while slightly green because they ripen better and faster off the tree; look for pears with a smooth unblemished skin; ripe ones will yield slightly to gentle pressure at the stem end. If you plan to bake pears, select those that are fairly firm."

Pears may be the perfect treat. These relatives of the apple ripen after being picked, and the resulting sweetness tastes heavenly whether the pear just came from the refrigerator or finished baking in the oven just moments ago.

Home food preservers have many recipes to choose from when deciding what to make with pears. The Master Food Preservers of El Dorado County demonstrate how to can "Apples, Pears and More" on October 4th at 10:00 a.m., and include in the class handout recipes for Brandied Pears, Peppery Pear Salsa, Pear Mincemeat and Pear Port Compote. The free public education class led by the MFP volunteers also explains all about apples (and more!).

The free class on Saturday, October 1 at 10:00 a.m. takes a different turn and teaches novices and masters alike all the ins and outs of olives. Come and be amazed at how easy it is to make olives at home, with safe home food preservation techniques.

Questions about safe home food preservation? Call the Master Food Preservers and leave a message at (530) 621-5506. A Master Food Preserver will return the call. The Master Food Preservers are also available free of charge to speak to organizations and clubs about food safety or food preservation topics. Just call the number above to arrange for a speaker for small or large groups. For more information, be sure to go to the Master Food Preserver website at http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.org/Master_Food_Preservers/.