

# ASIAN PEAR



Asian pear trees (*Pyrus pyrifolia*) are resilient and reliable as well as beautiful and productive. Blooming in the spring with fragrant white blossoms, they provide bright foliage in the fall. Native to China, Korea, and Japan, these small trees reach 12 to 20 feet and are hardy to  $-10^{\circ}\text{F}$ . Their growth can be spreading or upright, depending on the variety; the spreading ones are easiest to manage, but fruit quality may be better with upright growers. Trees start to bear fruit about 4 or 5 years after planting and keep producing for at least 20 years.

## ENJOYING THE FRUIT

Asian pears have the shape and crunch of an apple but taste like a pear. Delicious fresh off the tree, they are commonly eaten raw to best appreciate their sweet, juicy, crisp texture. Those same qualities make Asian pears good additions to salads, sandwiches, and stir-fries. You could even try pickling them to preserve their crispness.

The fruits should be kept in the refrigerator for the longest storage but won't last more than a few weeks. You can also dry slices in a dehydrator.

Asian pears provide fiber, vitamins and minerals (including C, K, potassium, copper), and beneficial plant compounds. Traditional Chinese medicine considers the fruit beneficial for coughs and sore throats, among other uses.



## CHOOSING A SITE

Asian pears like full sun. The soil should be well-drained and loamy, with a pH between 6.0 and 7.0.

## PLANTING

Planting at least two Asian pear trees is best to ensure a good crop. Plant compatible types within 50 feet of each other to encourage cross-pollination, or plant one tree that has multiple compatible varieties grafted onto it.

## TAKING CARE: WATERING, FEEDING, PRUNING

Watering is crucial in the first few years, so water weekly as necessary.

Don't fertilize in the first year of planting. Fertilize in the spring of year 2 with a small amount of balanced organic fertilizer; Asian pears aren't heavy feeders. Each spring after the first year, add a few inches of compost around the base, to the drip line.

Pruning is necessary. In late winter, remove any broken branches or water sprouts. You want the branches to spread and allow in good light. Also at this time, remove any buds on the branches' undersides, as they won't get the sun needed to produce good fruit. You may prune away up to 20% of the tree. In summer, prune again to take out any water sprouts or vigorous unwanted growth.

When the fruit is about as big as a dime, thin the clusters to leave only 1 to 3 of the biggest pears, depending on the size of the tree. Otherwise, your tree will produce many pears that are too small.

## AVOIDING PESTS AND DISEASE

Codling moth is the primary pest. You can use pheromone-baited sticky traps to control populations if they are an issue.

Fire blight (a disease caused by bacteria) can also be a problem, but you can choose these varieties that are more resistant: Chojuro, Kikusui, Kosui, Seuri, Shinko, Shinsui, and Singo.

## HARVESTING

The trees hold their fruit until it's completely ripe in mid to late autumn, depending on the variety. You can wait until the pears fall to the ground, but they do bruise easily. By cradling them gently with your hand, you should be able to easily break the fruit away from its branch without pulling.

## CONSIDERING SPECIFIC VARIETIES

Russet pears, which are yellowish-brown, and green pears, which are yellowish green, are the two main categories. These are some of the common varieties:

### HOSUI

Consistently rated one of the best-tasting Asian pears, this russet type starts out yellow and turns golden-brown when ripe.

### 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY

A green pear from Japan that's juicy with a mild flavor.

### SHINSEIKI

A bright yellow fruit that stores well in the refrigerator without compromising flavor.

### SHINKO

A crisp, juicy, golden-brown russet that has a strong flavor and is resistant to fire blight.

