

Taflen Wybodaeth Glasu / Information Sheet – Rhif 4 / No. 4 TYNNU A STORIO FFRWYTHAU / PICKING AND STORING

If home grown fruit is to be enjoyed at its best it needs to be eaten at the “peak of perfection”. Knowing the correct time to harvest and how to store the fruit plays a key part in this enjoyment.

There are various signs to look for which indicate stages in the ripening process. It is important to be able to interpret these signs correctly.

1. Shedding fruit

It may be assumed that if fruit is falling off a tree then the rest of the fruit is ready to be picked. This can be misleading. It is quite common for apples, pears and plums to shed small fruits early in the summer. This is called the “June Drop”. Basically the tree is getting rid of excess fruit to give a chance for the rest to mature properly. June drop is more noticeable during dry weather when a tree is under stress. The fruit on the tree is not ready to harvest.

2. Early drop

Apples, and occasionally pears, may fall off a tree several weeks in advance of the correct time to harvest. If you pick one of the fallen fruits off the ground and cut it open with a knife you might see damage near the core. It usually looks like small bore holes. The surrounding flesh is brown instead of creamy white. This is evidence of the feeding of the codling moth caterpillar. Trees often shed damaged fruit early. The fruit on the rest of the tree may not be ready to harvest.

3. Palming

If you take a fruit gently in the cup of your hand and lift it upwards it may snap where the stalk joins the branch. The fruit is now ready to pick. Do not assume that all the fruit is ready on the same day. It may need to be harvested over a period of several days. Fruits exposed to the sun are likely to be ready before those hidden on the shady side of the tree.

Timescale

As a general rule, plums will be harvested in August through to early September. Apples and pears may be harvested from early August until late October. The date for apples and pears is very much dependent on the variety. This is a major identification factor when trying to put a name to an unfamiliar variety. All orchard fruits for human consumption should be gathered before the first frosts of winter.

Storing orchard fruit

When a fruit is picked it is not killed. The cells are still alive and the fruit will continue to develop. The speed of this continuing development is linked to the air temperature surrounding the fruit. The higher the air temperature the faster the development process. Some fruits will be ready to eat and at their best the moment they are picked off the tree. This is particularly true of plums. It also applies to apples and pears which are harvested in the early part of the season, i.e. early August to late September.

Plums soon deteriorate once picked and if they are not to be eaten within a day or so they can be preserved by freezing, bottling or making jam.

Early harvested apples and pears can be stored by freezing them in the form of pie fillings, apple sauce and puree. Pears are traditionally preserved by bottling in syrup. Both apples and pears can be preserved as liquid by crushing the fruit and pasteurising the juice.

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To store apples and pears as whole fruit successfully you need to observe some basic guidelines.

- 1 Remember that the air temperature is critical to long term storage. The ideal storage temperature is the same as a domestic refrigerator, between 1°C and 5°C. This is easy to achieve by storing in a barn, outhouse or garage. Try to pick the fruit in the coolest part of the day to keep it at a low temperature.
- 2 Don't attempt to store any fruit that is damaged. It will soon rot and is likely to infect sound fruit stored nearby.
- 3 Store fruit in the dark if possible. This tends to slow down the maturing process.
- 4 Make sure that the fruit store is vermin proof. Rats and mice love human food and will contaminate far more than they eat.
- 5 Store fruit in single layers with a slight gap between each one so that the spread of rotting is limited.
- 6 Do not wrap the individual fruits in newspaper or tissue. It makes examination of the fruit very difficult.
- 7 Slatted wooden shelves, stackable vegetable trays and egg trays are all good items for storing apples and pears.
- 8 Check stored fruit regularly for deterioration. When apples have gone past their best they may still be edible but are likely to develop a woolly texture and lose some of their flavour. Pears often decay from the inside outwards. Check them by cutting one in half. Once past their best they soon deteriorate and their flesh turns sloppy. They are said to have become 'sleepy'.
- 9 Enjoy your fruit!