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Dennis Hinkamp
Utah State University

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GARDEN NOTES

PLANT A PEAR TREE FOR YOUR PARTRIDGE

By Dennis Hinkamp

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Pear trees are more than a place to park your partridge. Some of the more exotic varieties are ornamental landscape additions and taste like a cross between apples and pears.

Are they called sugar apples, apple pears, oriental apples or salad pears? Asian pears really aren't a cross or weird variation of anything, says Jerry Goodspeed, Utah State University Extension horticulturist. Though native to China and the Far East, they can be grown here in Utah.

Historians believe that the seeds were brought to America and planted by Chinese miners along the stream banks of the Sierra Nevada during the California Gold Rush. As the trees grew the fruit was introduced to America, Goodspeed says. Eventually, commercial plantings were established, and today, they have their own place in the fruit market.

"Asian pears trees are ornamental reaching a height of 15 to 20 feet. They have striking large, white blossoms in the spring, have deep green leaves in summer, and in the fall most trees turn a nice yellow-orange."

Differing from the oval shape of common pears, he says Asian pear fruit is round, crisp and juicy. The nickname "apple pear" comes from the crisp, juicy characteristics of the ripe fruit. The taste is distinctive, somewhat sweet and many varieties are also aromatic.

"Asian pears are often classified by their skin color. The most popular types are green skinned varieties. Some turn a yellow shade when ripe. Brown skinned (russet) varieties are less common, and usually have some russet on the skin when the pear is ripe, he says."

Goodspeed says, unlike common pears, the Asian variety ripens on the tree and requires no storage or waiting period before consuming. Asian pears can be canned and preserved, but most people prefer them fresh. The fruit will only store for a week or two unless refrigerated.

The tree's growth requirements are similar to common pears, he says. "They prefer well drained soil and perform better in a soil rich in organic matter. To keep the trees manageable prune annually in the early spring."

Also like common pears, Asian pears are highly susceptible to fire blight.

"If the weather is rainy and warm during bloom, an application of streptomycin (sold as

Fire Blight Control) will be needed. This protects the plant when the disease is spread. If the tree still develops fire blight, the diseased twigs and branches should be removed as soon as they are detected," Goodspeed says.

Another attractive feature of Asian Pear trees is that they are considered to be somewhat "self-fruitful," he says. This means they do not require another pear tree to pollinate them in order to produce fruit. However, the trees bear heavier if there is another pear tree within sight. A Bartlett pear can even act as a good pollinator.

Goodspeed says many varieties of Asian pears can be grown in our area. The most popular variety is probably "Nijisseiki" (20th Century). The taste is sweet with a slight trace of tartness. The fruit is green skinned and round. The tree can be a heavy producer and may need to be thinned in the early summer to promote good sized fruit. Other varieties include "Chojuro," which is a brown-green skinned with a small bit of russeting. "Shinseiki" is said to have the most uniform shape and size. They have a yellow skin and mild flavor. Still other varieties include "Kikusui," "Seigyoku," and "Doitsu."

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