



TOP LEFT Pear 'Glou Morceau', 1880.

A freestanding example of a linked espalier, creating a hedge or fenced effect in front of the orchard house in the walled Organic Gardens at Audely End.

BELOW LEFT Harvested culinary pear 'Vicar of Winkfield', which can be picked from October through to December and will also keep for a good while prior to use.

RIGHT Jacky serves up slices of pear and almond tart. **OPPOSITE PAGE** Poached Pears in wine can be spiced up with clove and cinnamon. Serve warm with custard or cold with a dollop of cream fraiche..

Pears

Standfirst

PHOTOGRAPHS MICHELLE GARRETT **WORDS** JACKY HOBBS

B As the year rushes to its end you may be surprised to find delicious pears in our November feature but, when planning the edible garden it is essential to maintain a monthly flow of tasty produce. Whilst you may be plucking tender, rosy-cheeked desert pears from mid summer onwards, more portly, substantial varieties soldier on, sometimes until December. These are the forgotten stalwarts of the winter fruit larder, largely heritage culinary pears, rarely available from supermarkets. A delectable secret for the edible gardener, they cook and store well, unlike desert pears which last a matter of days.

In short, pears are like socks - they always need to come in pairs

December surpluses can also be decadently gilded with edible gold or silver leaf for gifts, seasonal decorations or centrepieces.

Pears are less common in the garden than apples, but have similar growth habits, are simpler to prune, relatively free from pests and disease as well as being more vigorous. Though they do prefer a warmer, drier spot, in slightly acidic, free draining soil. Some varieties do well in pots, those grafted on smaller 'Quince C' rootstock are best, but they need to be pruned to keep specimens juvenile and restrict ▶



Expert Advice

TRAINING PEARS WITH MIKE THURLOW, AUDELY END'S HEAD GARDENER

Cordon, fan or espalier training is decorative, ideal for small spaces and extremely productive as horizontal stems afford higher yields. I've used a horizontal espalier as an example:

- **Year one.** Buy a year old, untrained, bare-root, maiden pear in Nov-Mar.
- **Plant, centrally** to selected pre-wired framework (horizontally arranged 25-30cm apart). Keep the graft clear of the ground. Leave 3.5-4.5m between espaliers to allow horizontal growth.
- **Cut the stem** at the first horizontal wire, just above two buds.
- **Train the main leader** upwards and the emergent side shoots outwards, tying them into straight, supporting canes. Cane young, supple shoots in an upright position to stimulate growth, adjusting to the required horizontal before stems harden.
- **Prune back by a third** after leaf fall, cutting to a downward bud. Remove any laterals other than the main arms.
- **Year two.** Allow main leader to grow to the next lateral wire. Cut and train second tier branches as above.
- **Summer prune all**, as before. 'Rub off' any fruit on the lower tier to allow plant to mature. Prune fruiting spurs 5-10cm long and 20cm apart.
- **Year three.** Continue growing and pruning, building a framework over time, adding another tier each year. A three year old lower tier should be fruiting from the summer onwards.



image captions here

over-zealous growth. Re-pot annually, they can stay in the same pot, but use fresh compost. At Audely End Organic Kitchen Garden in Essex, the extended warmth of orchard house benefits pots of later maturing, particularly continental, fruits.

Failure to fruit is always a disappointment, frost is usually the culprit, so do protect by planting in a frost-free position, cossetting wall-grown crops with blanket of fleece if frost threatens, and move pots indoors. Remember pear blossom is ephemeral and early - appearing in March and April - so don't get caught out.

Few pears are self-fertile, Dessert pears 'Conference', 'Concorde' and 'Invincible' are exceptions, consequently popular in small or urban gardens, 'Family trees', with suitable pollination partners grafted onto a single root stock; present another 'compact' solution. Otherwise plant additional pear trees from the same pollination group as yours (buy bare root stock from reputable fruit specialist nurseries and they will advise soundly on what works with what) to ensure you get fruit. In short, pears are like socks - they need to come in pairs!

You will still need to choose flavour, size, colour and style of tree, see the panel below for some suggestions.



Perfect Pairings

- Try 'Seckle' - this small, tiny, sweet pear can be eaten like bon-bons or dipped in chocolate for special confections.
- 'Beurre Six', 'Comice', 'Concorde' and 'Conference' are larger dessert pears which when ripe, need no cooking and can be used in many heat-free recipes.
- 'Williams', 'Seckle', and 'Forelle' are versatile varieties as unripe fruit can be used as a dessert or a culinary pears.
- Culinary pears, in their raw state are solid as bricks, but traditionally were grown for slow cooking in the Victorian perpetual burning oven. Heritage culinary pears 'Vicar of Winkfield', 'Black Worcester' and 'Cadillac' are still available from specialist nurseries to the home fruit grower. Their late cropping makes fresh produce available right through to December, especially as these keep for a while.



Events & where to buy

- **Audley End Organic Kitchen Garden**, Saffron Walden, Essex CB11 4JG. Visit the website for details about garden opening times. Tel. +44 (0)1799 522148. www.gardenorganic.org.

COURSES AND FRUIT TREE SUPPLIERS.

- **Thornhayes Nursery**, Cullompton, Devon EX15 2DF. 'Trained Fruit: How to do it' workshop, Dec 8, 2-4pm, £12. Call +44 (0)1884 266746 or see website for details, www.thornhayes-nursery.co.uk
- **RHS Centre at Pershore College**, Avonbank, Warwickshire WR10 3JP. Fruit Pruning Workshop. Nov 19, 10am-4pm, £50. Tel+ 44 (0) 1386 551142. www.warwickshire.ac.uk.

- **RHS Fruit Group**. If you are interested in growing fruit and accessing opportunities to attend a wide range of lectures and workshops, join the Society's Fruit Group for £7. For further information visit www.rhs.org.uk

- **Keepers Nursery**, Gallants Court, East Farleigh, Maidstone, Kent ME15 0LE. Tel: +44 (0)1622 726465. www.keepers-nursery.co.uk

- **Thompson & Morgan**, Poplar Lane, Ipswich, Suffolk IP8 3BU. Their 'Family' pear tree, £39.99, is grafted with Williams, Conference and Comice, and is suitable for containers. **EXCLUSIVE OFFER** for *The English Garden* readers: Save £5 by quoting xxxxx when you place an order for the Family pear tree. Call 0844 2485383 or visit www.thompson-morgan.com

Recipe 1 Poached pears (see previous page)

Serves 3 people

- 3 firm pears
- 300ml white or rose wine
- 50g sugar
- Squeeze of lemon juice
- Optional cinnamon sticks, cloves

- **Peel pears**, leaving the stalk. Rub in lemon juice.
- **Place in a tall pan** so they can stand upright and add wine, sugar and spices.
- **Top up with water**, (until it reaches the pear's neck) and gently simmer until they are tender
- **Remove pears and reserve**. Reduce remaining liquid, pour over pears and serve with custard.



Recipe 2 Pear and walnut winter salad with goat's cheese.

Serves 4 people

- 1-2 firm pears
- 100g walnuts
- 1 bunch of wild rocket
- Seasonal salad leaves (radicchio, chicory).
- 150g soft goat's cheese.
- Olive oil and lemon juice for dressing.

- **Place washed and spin-dry** salad leaves in serving dish, thinly slice pears lengthways, avoiding the core and arrange. Sprinkle with handfuls of walnuts and decorate with slices of goats cheese. Dress with olive oil and lemon juice and season to taste.

Recipe 3 Pear and Almond Tart

(This is an adaptation of Nigella Lawson's Bakewell Tart with fresh Raspberries - it is the best sweet pastry I have ever made)

For the base:

- 175g plain flour
- 30g ground almonds
- 65g icing sugar
- 130g butter
- 1 egg yolk

- **Mix together the dry** ingredients before making a fine crumb mix with the butter. Add the egg yolk to bind until it makes a ball of pastry. Wrap with Clingfilm and refrigerate for 20 mins. Roll out and line a loose base flan tin, pop it back into the fridge whilst you make the filling.

For the filling:

- 3 tablespoons raspberry or damson jam
- 3 eggs
- 125g ground almonds
- 125g melted butter
- 125g castor sugar
- 15g flaked almonds
- 2-3 pears, peeled and quartered

- **Beat together the sugar and eggs** (I throw in the spare white from the pastry too). Stir in the melted butter and the ground almonds. Spread the base of the flan with jam and pour in the filling. Arrange the quartered pears and decorate with a tiny central pear if you have one. Sprinkle with chopped almonds and place in a preheated oven, 200 degrees C, for 30-40 minutes, until golden. Serve warm or chilled.

