

News from the farm: As a kid, I hated pears. The flavor was good, but I could never get over the texture. Little did I know, they are smooth as butter when properly harvested and ripened. Here's an excerpt from an extension agency on perfecting pear harvest:

Unlike apples, most pear varieties do not ripen nicely while still on the tree. Pears that are allowed to become too mature or to ripen on the tree develop a coarse, mealy texture and often have core breakdown as the pear ripens from the inside out. David Sugar, who has spent most of his career studying fruit physiology at Oregon State University says pears are tricky, but not really difficult, to ripen just right.

Pears picked when slightly immature will ripen with better quality than pears that are over mature when picked. To tell if a pear is mature, a general rule of thumb is that, while still on the tree, most mature, ready to ripen pears will usually detach when "tilted" to a horizontal position from their usual vertical hanging position."

" Pears must go through a series of changes before they can deliver their full splendor," explained Sugar. Once commercial pears are picked, growers cool them down to about 30 degrees F. They don't freeze at this temperature, because the fruit sugar acts like an antifreeze. Most pears require 2 to 6 weeks of cooling for optimal effect, he said. Next, Sugar recommends ripening pears at 65 to 75 degrees F for 4-10 days.

And how do you tell when a pear is ripened to perfection? "Hold the pear gently but firmly in the palm of your hand, as a baseball pitcher might hold the ball while studying signs from the catcher," recommended Sugar. "Apply the thumb of that same hand to the pear flesh just below the point where the stem joins the fruit. When the flesh beneath your thumb yields evenly to gentle pressure, it is time to eat your pear. If you have to push more than slightly, it is not ready yet."

CSA Members: Your pears were removed from cold storage on 9/7. Please ripen before eating!

Here's what's in your box: Chioggia beets, Winterbor Kale, Garlic, Heirloom Tomatoes (Wapsipinicon Peach, Green Zebra, Italian Heirloom), Green Mini Romaine, French Breakfast Radish, Seckel Pear x 6, and Warren Pear x 2

"After years of study, scientists have found that a really juicy pear is best eaten while naked, in the bathtub, so that you needn't be concerned about the abundant juice streaming down your chin."

~David Sugar

Recipe:

ROASTED BEET, PEAR & WALNUT SALAD

- 3 medium sized beets,
- a small drizzle of olive oil, for roasting the beets
- 1 ripe pear, chopped into ½ inch pieces
- ¼ cup walnuts, toasted
- ¼ cup feta cheese, crumbled (or more)
- a few handfuls of salad greens of your choice (hint hint: romaine & kale!)
- ¼-1/2 cup cooked quinoa (optional, for a heartier salad)
- 1-2 tablespoons olive oil
- a drizzle of balsamic vinegar
- a drizzle of honey
- salt & pepper

Instructions: Preheat oven to 350° F. Roast the beets by drizzling them with a bit of olive oil, some salt and pepper, and wrapping them in foil. Depending on the size of your beets, they should take from 40 minutes to 1 hour to roast in the oven. They should be fork-tender when they are done. Set them aside to cool... as soon as they're cool enough to touch, run them under the faucet and slide off the skins with your hands. Chop into roughly ½ inch cubes and set them aside to cool completely.

*Optional step-Take the already-cooked quinoa and toast it a little, by tossing it in a small hot skillet for a couple of minutes. Drizzle a little olive oil and some salt on it, and remove from the heat and set aside.

Assemble all salad ingredients on a platter. Drizzle with a liberal amount of olive oil, a bit of balsamic vinegar, honey, and some salt and pepper.