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Cold Snap pear set to entice Ontario fruit consumers

Ontario-developed pear more disease-resistant, keeps fresh taste all winter

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Cold Snap pears, a new variety developed in Ontario, are harvested in September but may remain fresh-tasting until March when stored like apples in modified gaseous atmospheres. (Vineland Growers Co-operative, vinelandgrowers.com)

We love apples in the fall, crispy and freshly picked from local orchards. But let's also celebrate another autumn fruit favourite that sometimes gets ignored: the pear. It's about to experience something of a Renaissance in Ontario too.

A relative of the apple – some would say its grandfather in the familial lineage – the pear has been cultivated for several thousand years.

They are a bit trickier to grow than apples and not as abundant, but even so there are hundreds of varieties of pears grown in temperate regions around the world.

Pears are versatile in the kitchen, lending themselves to both sweet and savoury applications, and they can have a seductive buttery texture when ripe – which in fact eclipses an apple for flavour, at least for my money.



Cold Snap pears, a new variety developed in Ontario, will hit the store shelves in the autumn of 2016. (Vineland Growers Co-operative, vinelandgrowers.com)

New Canadian pear variety

Like apples, pears are best in the late fall: Bosc pears hit their peak in October; the Anjou is perfect in November. Unlike apples, however, most of the pears we find in our grocery store produce departments are imported.

Until now, that is. Now Canada has its own new native variety, the ["Cold Snap" pear](#).

The progeny of traditional breeding (using one variety to pollinate another), the Cold Snap pear is a decades-long result of a research and crop science alliance between Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) and the [Vineland Growers' Co-operative](#), located in Jordan, Ont.

The Cold Snap pear is a cross between the Bartlett pear and a variety known as "US56112-146" produced in 1972 at the AAFC research station in Harrow, Ont.

Its development – the first trees were planted about five years ago – could represent something of a rejuvenation of the pear in Ontario, an industry that has suffered the throes of plant diseases. It is one reason fewer Ontario farmers are growing the delicious Bosc pear, for example, and why there was focus on the disease resistance of the Cold Snap pear.

"Today, growers won't plant pear trees unless they have the ability to resist a disease called fire blight. With a series of trees developed by Agriculture Canada, producers today have a future in growing pears," said Dave Lepp, director of operations at the Vineland Growers' Co-operative.

'Fresh' Ontario pears in March?

The Co-op purchased the rights for the pear from the Vineland Research and Innovation Centre.

This year, the pears have mostly been harvested and are currently in cold storage, says Lepp. "They've been off the tree about a month and should be ready in early- to mid-November."

After the pears are picked, they are stored in atmosphere-modified warehouses similar to apples for about 60 days. However, they also continue to mature and ripen slowly during that time.



While the Bartlett pear is marketed from early September to November, for instance, the Cold Snap pear gives producers an opportunity to extend the local season all the way through March or even April, depending on supply. The variety grows in high densities of 1,000 trees per acre with a good yield – just what growers want.

For their part, the Co-op wanted to be able to market a local pear in winter. Hence the Cold Snap name. They have a very long shelf-life compared to other pears; in fact, the Cold Snap doesn't even pack its fullest punch of flavour until mid-November when the starches have converted to natural sugars.

There are about 20 growers of Cold Snap pears in the Niagara region, and the Co-op's goal, according to Lepp, is to double their pear production for next year.

"This year, we have about 15,000 cases," he said. The Co-op, markets the pears on behalf of the growers. Major retailers will be selling the pears across Ontario including at Zehrs Markets and Sobeys in Waterloo Region.

The growing conditions this year have reportedly given the new pear a good start for this winter. Lepp is excited about the new crop, citing the right weather this season for "supreme quality pears," as he describes the anticipated batch of Cold Snaps.

"Their sweetness will be fantastic," he says. "With the sugar content high, the result will be the best taste available."

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/kitchener-waterloo/cold-snap-ontario-pear-andrew-coppolino-1.3805240>