



ASK A MASTER GARDENER

POMEGRANATES

By Trish Grenfell, Placer County Master Gardener

Q Several months ago I bought a home with a pomegranate tree and I can see fruit growing on the tree now. How can I tell when they are ripe?

A Pomegranates are ripe in early autumn: October and November. The timing of ripe fruit is dependent on the bloom time and weather conditions over summer, but generally pomegranates ripen six to seven months after flowering, depending on the cultivar.

According to UC Davis, you should generally harvest your fruit when they have developed a distinctive color and make a metallic sound when tapped. The size will be about that of a softball with a bright/deep red or orange (depends on your cultivar and the amount of potash in the soil).

Some backyard growers wait for a few fruit to “split,” a cracking of the outer shell. They watch for the first few pomegranates on the tree to split and then they taste a few fruits from the tree. If the fruit passes the taste test, they begin harvesting the others on the tree as needed. Both split and un-split fruits are good to eat but ideally most fruit should be picked just prior to splitting. If it rains, the split fruit on the tree may spoil. Pomegranates can be stored for several months in the refrigerator, but if you plan on storing them, you’ll also need to choose fruits without splits.

Usually before ripening, the skin is hard, tight and cannot be easily scratched. When ripe, the outer skin becomes bit soft. If you are able to scratch the skin using your fingernail and gentle pressure, then it is ripe.

Another sign is the shape of the fruit. The unripe fruit is exactly round in shape like apple. When ripe, the round shape is changed with the sides slightly become square. This happens due to the arils (seed coverings) pressing against the outer wall as they reach maximum juice content. A pomegranate has slots inside the fruit, the round shape is stressed and the fruit looks flattened on the sides.

And if you look at the petals that create a rose-like formation at the crown, they turn slightly inside on a ripe fruit.

There is no way to artificially ripen a pomegranate. After the fruit is harvested, it does not ripen any further and therefore the pomegranate travels and stores well.

One last tip: the fruits should not be pulled off but clipped close to the base so as to leave no stem to cause damage in handling.

Enjoy your pomegranate tree with its exotic fruit now and beautiful orange flowers in the spring.

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