

Fresh Bites: Cold Snap pears offer juicy fresh taste into the New Year

Sweet, juicy pear with pretty pink blush aims to become Winter's Favourite Fruit

By Cynthis David
November 23, 2016



Serve up Cold Snap pears as part of a hazelnut cake. (FOODLAND ONTARIO)

Late fall usually is a sad time for local pear lovers as first Bartlett, then Bosc disappear from supermarket shelves, to be replaced by imports.

But until the end of January Ontario growers are proudly packing a new late-season variety in bright blue bags and clamshells with whimsical graphics.

Here's to Cold Snap, the sweet, juicy pear with the pretty pink blush that aims to become Winter's Favourite Fruit.

"It will probably take a couple of years to become a household name like Honeycrisp," says Matthew Ecker, sales and business development manager at

Vineland Growers Co-operative in Jordan Station, which grows and markets the fruit.

Though picked by late September with other local pears, Cold Snap's firmer flesh stays fresh for several months in controlled storage.

"Last year, our first, we had minimal volume," Ecker says, "this year we'll go to the end of January and we expect to increase our supply by about 50 per cent a year for the next few years, eventually going to February or March."

This squat, roly-poly pear, the first bred in Canada, was released in 1972 under the name AC Harovin Sundown. As the first of 75,000 trees in Ontario and Nova Scotia came of age last year, growers searched for a catchier name. Cold Snap was born, with its own website, coldsnappear.ca.

As part of the branding process, Consumer Insights Research program leader Amy Bowen conducted pear focus groups at Niagara's Vineland Research and Innovation Centre.

Consumers are particularly annoyed with pears that are rock-hard one day and mushy the next, Bowen says, a problem Cold Snap doesn't have.

"People liked it because it's less grainy than other pears with a crisp and juicy texture," she says. "Sweet, lemony and floral flavours all come together to create a balanced taste and it retains its firmness."

She says participants also loved the pear's made-in-Canada story.

It's sustainable

Cold Snap is not only proudly local, it's grown using new techniques that produce lots of skinny Charlie Brown-like trees loaded with pears on far less land than the old sprawling trees. It's also naturally resistant to fire blight, which has decimated many Ontario orchards. Cold Snap's clamshells are made from recycled water bottles.

Buy & Store

- Look for 2-pound (1 kg) bags or clamshells of Cold Snaps in retail stores until late January.

- If you like firm pears, refrigerate immediately. Or leave on the counter for two to three days to soften slightly.
- Bright yellow skin indicates optimal flavour. Unlike its Bartlett cousin, Cold Snap remains firm even when ripe.
- Don't store near aromatic foods such as onions.

Prep

- Handle fibre-rich pears with care to avoid bruising.
- Rinse under cool running water and serve. Peel and core just before using.
- Cold Snap is pear-fect for poaching, roasting, grilling or baking.

Serve

- Try a pear-cranberry crisp or a pear-parsnip soup.
- Think preserves, dumplings and sorbet.
- Slice and serve raw with a plate of creamy cheeses or toss in a salad, leaving on the pretty yellow skin.

Hazelnut Pear Cake

Poached Cold Snaps shine in this light and lovely gluten-free cake from Foodland Ontario. Serve with whipped cream, if desired, or with caramel or rum sauce.

4-1/2 cups (1.125 L) water

2-3/4 cups (675 mL) granulated sugar

1 tsp (5 mL) lemon zest

1/4 cup (50 mL) fresh lemon juice

1-1/2 tsp (7 mL) vanilla

5 small Cold Snap pears, peeled, cored and halved

2 cups (500 mL) ground hazelnuts

2 tbsp (30 mL) cornstarch

6 large eggs, separated

1/4 tsp (1 mL) cream of tartar

Garnish: icing sugar

In large saucepan, combine water, 1-1/2 cups (375 mL) of the sugar, lemon zest, lemon juice and 1/2 tsp (2 mL) vanilla. Stir over medium-high heat until sugar dissolves. Add pears; bring to boil. Reduce heat to medium and simmer until pears are just tender, turning occasionally, about 10 minutes. Let cool in syrup. (Prepare up to 1 day ahead, cover and refrigerate.)

Drain pears well, reserving syrup for another use. In medium bowl combine hazelnuts, 1 cup (250 mL) of the remaining sugar and cornstarch; set aside.

Grease and flour (regular or gluten free) a 10-inch (3 L) springform pan. Set aside.

In large bowl, beat egg yolks until frothy. Stir in remaining 1 tsp (5 mL) vanilla and hazelnut mixture until well combined; set aside.

With clean beaters, beat egg whites until frothy. Add cream of tartar and beat to soft peaks. Beat in remaining 1/4 cup (50 mL) sugar until peaks are stiff. Stir one-third of whites into egg yolk mixture and combine well. Gently fold in remaining whites. Pour into prepared pan.

Place one pear half, cut-side down, in the centre of batter and arrange remaining halves in a circle around it, stem toward centre, leaving a 1-inch (2.5 cm) border. Bake in 350°F (180°C) oven 1 hour and 15 minutes or until golden brown and cake part no longer looks wet. Cool on rack for 15 minutes. Run sharp knife around edge of pan. Remove side and use a metal spatula to remove bottom; cool cake completely on rack.

To serve, dust with icing sugar from a small sieve.

Makes 10 servings.

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