

Book Review:

The Book of Pears: The Definitive History and Guide to Over 500 Varieties

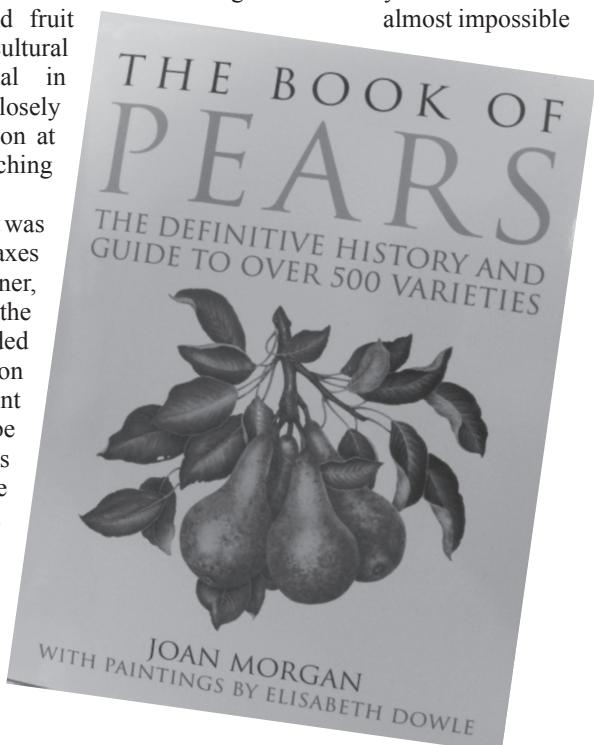
Joan Morgan with paintings by Elisabeth Dowle. 2015. Chelsea Green Publishing. 85 North Main St., Suite 120, White River Junction, VT 05001. Hardcover. ISBN 978-1-60358-666-5. Hardcover \$65.00.

‘The Book of Pears’ takes the reader on a wonderfully rich history of the fruit, providing often surprising details of the importance of pear in ancient and more recent civilizations. Dr. Joan Morgan traces the origins of the cultivated pear back to accounts of massed plantings in ancient Persia around 500BC then skillfully guides us through the spread of pear around the world, interspersing the text with fascinating historic images that support the story.

Dr. Morgan is a pomologist and fruit historian, awarded the Royal Horticultural Society’s Veitch Memorial Medal in recognition of her work. She works closely with the UK National Fruit Collection at Brogdale in Kent and has been researching this book for many years.

It is difficult to believe the value that was placed on pears through the ages; taxes from the tenant farmers to the landowner, to prized specimens nurtured by the gardeners of large estates for the landed gentry. Careful collection and selection of varieties resulted in the development of fine quality pears that could be eaten fresh rather than cooked and as such became a standard feature on the dining tables of the rich and powerful. The number of varieties was greatly increased as fruit breeders, especially in Northern Europe, started to focus on pear; new improved varieties were quick to spread throughout the pear-growing regions of the world.

The second part of the book, the directory of pears, provides a comprehensive description of over 500 pear varieties, primarily those from the UK National Fruit Collection but also including others of interest (dessert, culinary, Asian, Asian/Western hybrids and perry pears). Each entry is categorized into season (early, medium or late), use (desert or culinary) and tree vigor with the addition of habit and disease resistance and susceptibility information as available. Triploids, confirmed through cytogenetics, are noted and each description usefully includes synonyms as well as a brief history with parentage if known. Dr. Morgan managed what many would consider almost impossible



by ripening these varieties and fully describing their sensory properties, both appearance and eating quality.

The accompanying website www.thebookofpears.fruitforum.net/ provides a gallery of photographs that attempt to capture the external key features that define each variety and is a wonderful addition to the text.

The 40 plates, accurately painted by artist Elisabeth Dowle, depict fruit, both ripened and on the tree, blossom and leaves. They add a delightfully detailed color splash throughout the chapters, causing the reader to pause in admiration and provide an additional point of reference when attempting to identify a variety. Ms Dowle is an internationally respected artist and has been awarded seven Royal Horticultural Society Gold Medals, one of which was given for some of the paintings in this book.

Dr. Morgan adds an excellent pear identification key based on season and shape, a section on growing pears for the amateur and even a small collection of recipes. Readers are left with a further information section listing pear collections around the world, both public and private, and a comprehensive reference section for those wanting more.

Once again Dr. Morgan has excelled herself with 'The Book of Pears'; it forms a perfect companion to 'The Book of Apples' and I strongly recommend it to all with an interest at every level in pome fruit.

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