Are you ready (to be picked)?

K-State horticulture expert provides guidelines on when to pick apples

By Jessica Jensen, K-State Research and Extension news service

MANHATTAN, Kan. — Who doesn’t love to take a bite out of a big, crunchy apple? Knowing when to pick those delicious apples depends on several factors, said Kansas State University horticulture expert Ward Upham.

“Apples mature over a long period of time depending on the variety,” Upham said. Depending on the variety, they can mature as soon as July or as late as October and November.

Upham gives some guidelines to help decide when to pick your apples based on such factors as days from bloom, flesh color, seed color, color change and flavor.

Days from bloom
“The number of days from bloom is the most reliable guide for maturity time, but weather conditions will have some influence,” Upham said. Depending on the kind of apple determines what the days from bloom to maturity are. For Jonathan apples, 135 days; Delicious, 145 days; Golden delicious, 145 days; and Winesap, 155 days.

Flesh color
When apples start to mature and starches change to sugars, the flesh changes from light green to white. “When you cut a thin slice and hold it up to the light you can see the difference,” Upham said.

Seed color
Most apple seeds change from light green to brown as the fruit ripens. “This indicator should be combined with other changes like flavor of the apple, change in the color of stem and calyx basins and flesh color,” Upham said.
Color change
The skin color in areas of the stem and the calyx basin at the bottom of the apple turns from immature green to a light-yellow color. “Some apples develop a red skin color over the majority of the fruit before they are ripe. (That is) not a reliable indication of maturity,” Upham said.

Flavor
“This is a good guide if you are familiar with the apples you have and know how they should taste,” Upham said. “If they are not ready to harvest, they will taste starchy or immature. If apples have already fallen and taste a bit starchy, store them for a period to see if they become sweeter.”

Upham and his colleagues in K-State’s Department of Horticulture and Natural Resources produce a weekly Horticulture Newsletter with tips for maintaining home landscapes. The newsletter is available to view online or can be delivered by email each week.

Interested persons can also send their garden- and yard-related questions to Upham at wupham@ksu.edu, or contact your local K-State Research and Extension office.