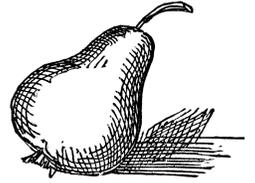


What are these trees?

The two trees nearest to you are plum trees (a variety called Mount Royal that is often used to make prunes, which are just dried plums). The other tree is a pear tree (a variety called Bartlett).



Actually, each tree you see is really *two* trees carefully stuck, or *grafted*, together. The bottom part (the part with roots) is called the *rootstock*, and is the same on each tree you see here. The upper part, or *scion*, is different on each tree. The person who grew the trees joined each rootstock and scion at a point called the *graft junction* that you can usually see as a lump on the trunk close to the ground.

There are two reasons for joining trees together like this. The first reason is that these kinds of fruit do not “breed true.” This means that if you take the seeds from a plum or pear you enjoyed eating and plant them, you will get plum or pear trees, but the fruits that grow on them will look and taste completely different from the plum or pear that you ate. As a result, if you want another tree that grows the same fruit you like, you must take pieces of green, growing wood from the tree your fruit came from, and “lend” those pieces roots by grafting them onto some another tree.

The other reason for grafting trees together like this is that each of the two pieces contributes some properties to the single tree that you see. The rootstock is a different kind of plum or pear tree that stays small and is resistant to disease, but whose fruit would taste bad if it were allowed to grow fruit (which it isn't — it only provides the roots to the grafted tree). The scion is a kind of plum or pear tree whose fruit tastes good, but that would get too big and be vulnerable to disease if it didn't “borrow” the properties of the rootstock (which it can do because it shares fluids with the rootstock). Almost every plum and pear tree in the world (and every other kind of fruit tree you can think of that's on a garden or farm) is actually two trees grafted together.

How were they planted? How are they being cared for?

These trees were planted in April of 2009. The trees came from Jung's Nursery in Fitchburg, WI, and were purchased as one-year-old “bare root” transplants, meaning that they did not come in pots or with soil, but with their roots exposed. The roots of bare root trees must be kept wet and the trees must be planted quickly. The day after the trees arrived, deep holes were prepared and each tree was planted. Care was taken to ensure that the roots pointed downward and that the junction between the rootstock tree and the scion tree was at least 4 inches above ground level. A wire cage was placed around each tree and the base of the tree buried in a few inches of gravel. Both the cage and the gravel keep mice from damaging the tree during the winter. Finally, fertilizer and lime were spread around the base of each tree.

These trees will be pruned each winter, probably in March, to remove dead or sick wood and establish a shape for each tree that allows light and air to reach each branch. The trees will also be fertilized each spring. We hope to have a first harvest in 2011 or 2012. (Fruit trees are a long-term investment!)

Who is taking care of them?

These plants were planted and are being cared for by an informal group of volunteers. The group includes people from around Madison who like fruit of all kinds and want to learn more about it. New people are always welcome! To get involved, e-mail the group at: ehcg.fruit@gmail.com

Why were they planted, and who will get the fruit?

Many people — even gardeners who grow their own vegetables — are unfamiliar with growing fruit and may think that they cannot do so themselves. Although you are asked NOT to plant trees in your garden plot, these trees were planted here to show you that ordinary people can indeed grow fruit, and this sign is intended to tell you a little about how it was done.

Because the Garden Committee felt that these plants would serve an educational purpose, the plants and the supplies used to take care of them are being purchased with money from gardeners' plot fees. As a result, the fruit belongs to all gardeners. We do ask that you:

- a) not harvest any fruit before it's ripe (the plums should be dark purple when they are ripe, and the pears yellow)
- b) take only one plum or pear so that others may enjoy the same experience
- c) be careful with the trees if you touch them
- d) think about joining the fruit group to help take care of the trees! (see above)