



Tried & tested *fruit pickers*

Geoff Hodge tests long-handled fruit pickers designed for easy harvesting

AUTUMN is the season of mists and mellow fruitfulness - and in our gardens and allotments bountiful fruitfulness! As apples and pears are now coming into crop, it's time to go picking.

If you have tall fruit trees, it can be difficult to pick everything high up in the

tree and at the tips of the branches. Even using a ladder can restrict picking the topmost fruit and can be dangerous if you don't support and secure them properly. In these cases you might need to hire a cherry picker! Or do you?

Well, the simple answer is no. There are some fantastic fruit pickers available

and those with telescopic handles can give you an easy picking height of up to 6m (20ft) depending on your height, reach and the length of handle you buy.

All but one of the pickers I tested have telescopic handles, and most of the suppliers have a range of different handle lengths, so you can choose a

handle to suit your requirements.

Interchangeable tool head systems are more expensive than those with fixed heads, but if you want to create your own tree and shrub care system - with loppers, saws and other attachments - then the price comes down and becomes far more reasonable.

The test

I tested a range of fruit pickers to gather apples, pears and plums from quite tall trees. I was looking at how well they removed the fruit, cushioned it from bruising and other damage and how easy they were to use at their maximum length.

Wolf-Garten Multi-change Adjustable Fruit Picker **Prices, see below**

Part of the Multi-change interchangeable tool system. The picking basket has rounded plastic teeth, you can adjust its angle with a wing nut and it has an integrated stainless steel blade.

Handle length 1.8m to 3.1m (6ft-10ft 4in).

Quality ★★★★★

Plastic-coated aluminium handle and cotton linen collection bag.

Performance ★★★★★

The teeth easily engaged and held the fruit stalk and the fruit during picking. It was useful being able to change the angle of the picking basket where the fruit hung in awkward positions.

Usability ★★★★★

Reasonably light and easy to use.

Value ★★★★★

Price guide Fruit picker £19.99; telescopic handle ZMV3 £35.99; telescopic handle ZMV200, extends to 2m (6ft 6in), £27.99; and telescopic handle ZMV4, extends to 4m (13ft 4in), £39.99.



WIN OUR 'BEST BUY' FRUIT PICKER

We have three of the BEST BUY Wolf-Garten Multi-change Adjustable Fruit Pickers with ZMV3 handles to give away! Send your name and address to Garden News Fruit Picker Giveaway, PO Box 57, Coates, Peterborough PE7 2FE or enter online at www.greatcompetitions.co.uk Closing date is October 9. Please write 'do not contact' if you don't want to be contacted by us or by carefully selected partner organisations.

Burgon & Ball Apple Picker **£11.95**

Uses metal wire teeth to grab and hold the fruit stalk. The fruit holding cage has a removable cushioned foam liner to help prevent bruising the fruit.

Handle length 1.5m (5ft).

Quality ★★★★★

Strong wooden handle and plastic-coated metal teeth and fruit-holding cage.

Performance ★★★★★

The teeth engaged and held the fruit and stalk well, but they did mark the skin of some very soft fruit.

Usability ★★★★★

One of the lightest pickers on test, so it was effortless to manoeuvre between the branches, but its short length, compared with the telescopic pickers, prevented gathering fruit higher than 3.6m (12ft).

Value ★★★★★



Fiskars Quikfit Fruit Picker **Prices, see below**

Part of the Quikfit interchangeable tool system. The picking basket has large rounded plastic teeth and you can adjust its angle using a screw nut to make picking and collection easier.

Handle length 2.25m to 4m (7ft 6in-13ft 4in).

Quality ★★★★★

Coated aluminium handle and thick cotton linen collection bag.

Performance ★★★★★

Worked well and the large teeth cupped even quite large fruit. The longest picker on test, so I could collect fruit very high up on the trees - up to around 5.6m (18ft 6in).

Usability ★★★★★

The heaviest picker on test, but average for weight per handle length. The telescopic handle has seven set heights and is easy to adjust using the rocker switch. The screw nut on the picking basket was difficult to undo, especially when wearing gloves.

Value ★★★★★

Price guide Fruit picker £24.99; medium telescopic shaft £40.99; telescopic graphite shaft is also available, extends to 6m (20ft), £47.99.



Yeoman Telescopic Fruit Picker **£14.99**

The picking basket has galvanised metal teeth with curved edges.

Handle length 1.7m to 2.95m (5ft 8in-9ft 10in).

Quality ★★★★★

Coated steel handle and cotton linen collection bag.

Performance ★★★★★

The teeth did mark the skin of some very soft fruit. The picking basket is held in place with a small wing nut, which started to work loose after extended use and could have been lost.

Usability ★★★★★

The second heaviest picker on test and reasonably heavy to lift up at all handle lengths. The infinitely variable telescopic handle uses a twist lock system and is simple to adjust to the desired height.

Value ★★★★★

Gardena Combisystem Fruit Picker **Prices, see below**

Part of the Combisystem interchangeable tool system. The picking basket has rounded plastic teeth and you can adjust its angle with a wing nut.

Handle length 1.65m to 2.95m (5ft 6in-9ft 10in).

Quality ★★★★★

Aluminium handle with protective plastic sleeve and cotton linen collection bag.

Performance ★★★★★

The teeth easily engaged and held the fruit stalk and fruit during picking. Being able to angle the picking basket proved useful.

Usability ★★★★★

One of the lightest pickers on test. The telescopic handle has six set heights and is straightforward to adjust.

Value ★★★★★

Price guide Fruit picker £16.99; telescopic handle 3711 £34.99; telescopic handle 3712, extends to 3.9m (13ft), is also available at £44.99.



Darlac Swop Top Fruit Picking Basket **Prices, see below**

Part of the Swop Top interchangeable tool system. The picking basket has rounded galvanised metal teeth with plastic covers to help prevent fruit bruising.

Handle length 1.4m to 2.5m (4ft 9in-8ft 4in).

Quality ★★★★★

Strong aluminium handle and cotton linen collection bag.

Performance ★★★★★

The teeth easily engaged and held the fruit stalk and fruit.

Usability ★★★★★

The lightest picker on test and easy to use.

Value ★★★★★

Price guide Fruit picking basket £6.95; standard telescopic pole £16; giant telescopic pole also available, extends to 5m (16ft 6in), £33.95.



SUPPLIERS: Some suppliers only sell to gardening stores, but you can often buy their products online. **Burgon & Ball** 0114 233 8262; www.burgonandball.com **Darlac** 01753 547790; www.darlac.com **Fiskars** UK, 0115 927 7335; www.fiskars.com **Gardena** from Husqvarna UK, 0844 844 4558; www.gardena.com/uk **Wolf-Garten** from E P Barrus, 01869 363636; www.wolf-garten.co.uk **Yeoman** 01905 791984; www.yeomangarden.com