Red Wine-Poached Pears
Serves 4 to 6

1 ¾ cups dry red wine, such as Cotes du Rhone, Pinot Noir or Merlot
½ cup port wine
1 ½ cups water
1 cup brown sugar
4 whole cloves
Orange zest from ½ orange
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
4 to 6 (about 8 ounces each) ripe but firm pears, preferably Bosc or Bartlett

Bring wine, water and sugar to a simmer in a large saucepan over medium heat. Add cloves, zest and vanilla. Simmer for about 20 minutes then remove from the heat.

Peel the pears, halve them lengthwise then remove stem lines and cores. Add the pears to the wine syrup. The liquid should just barely cover the pears; add more wine and sugar if necessary. Place pan over medium heat and bring liquid almost to a simmer. Cook gently (poach), uncovered, for 10 to 15 minutes until the pears are tender (a toothpick can be inserted with little resistance).

Remove from heat and let cool in the syrup for at least 20 minutes and up to 1 day in the refrigerator. To serve, place pear halves in individual bowls and spoon wine syrup over the pears.