

A taste of old ENGLAND

Enjoy the abundant harvest of English apples, each distinct in flavour and texture, to crunch upon in their natural state, sup their juices or to turn into delicious home-cooked delights



Seasonal gathering

All of the family can join in harvesting apples from the orchard. Gather baskets of windfall apples before you pluck from the trees as those on the ground are already ripe. Discard any nibbled or rotting fruit.



English Apples

LEFT Going to press

Apple presses come in a variety of sizes according to the volumes to be made and a crusher is a very useful attachment. Line the press with muslin to keep the pulpy bits together. Presses and crushers are available from vigopresses.com or wineworks.co.uk

BELOW Juicy fruits

Combine different varieties of apple for juicing. Apple juice made at Honeybee Farm in Kingswood, Surrey, is made using a selection of the 76 varieties that are grown on the farm. It is available to buy from the Hive Honey Shop in Battersea, London, thehivehoneyshop.co.uk



October is always welcome, the warm glow at summer's end, bringing with it the rustle of sunset leaves, plentiful harvests and boughs bent heavy with ripened fruits, and the pick of the crop are delicious English apples. As individual as our counties, revered in our home cooking and downed as juice and cider in our traditional hostelrys, apples are an integral part of the ritual of autumn.

Crab apples are native to Britain but the cultivated apple was introduced by the Romans, a fruit we have greedily embraced as our own. Centuries of kings and peasants have dined on and drunk the juice of the fruits from the now quintessential English orchard where the customary rituals of 'scrumpling' and mid-winter 'wassailing' continue today, to bless and 'borrow' the apple harvest.

Such is our love of the fruit, it is used figuratively to express that which is cherished above all others, 'the apple of my eye', attributed to King Alfred the Great of Wessex in AD 885 and repeated throughout history. Yet, despite a plethora of marvellous old English apples, as well as some newcomers, such as Falstaff grown in Kent from 1965, a crisp and crunchy, sweet, juicy dwarf apple, or Garden Sun Red, a twenty-first-century sweet, juicy, red apple, English apples are in decline. In 2010, Cox's Orange Pippin, production of which has reduced by 50 per cent in the last 25 years, was horribly usurped by New Zealand's

*'Flower of this purple dye,
Hit with Cupid's archery,
Sink in the apple of his eye'*

Act III, scene II, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Shakespeare

Gala apple, Britain's new best seller. Here we celebrate national varieties, revisit delicious ways to use our native apples and explore the ease with which it is possible to grow your own.

GROW-YOUR-OWN ENGLISH APPLES

The best time for planting apple trees is October to December. Select the variety and style according to taste, available space and pruning skill and time.

Apples are grafted onto a range of rootstocks, with the option of full-blown trees, dwarf or container specimens – the latter being ideal for smaller gardens – along with decorative, trained cordons, espaliers and fans for growing along walls, and step-over-apples to edge pathways or hold in borders. Most apple ▶

Apple table treats

Little tastes better than your very own, home-grown apple plucked straight from the tree, but apples and autumnal baking go hand in hand. Apple pies, tarts and baked apples are all firm favourites. It is also easy to magic apples into a tasty assortment of jellies, jams, chutneys and vinegars, or they can be peeled and stored for winter pies.



APPLE CAKE WITH PLUMS

Apples can be combined with many of our native soft fruits to transform into mouth-watering desserts

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| Makes 1 cake | 250g self-raising flour |
| Prep and cook time: 1h | 750g (3-4) apples, (e.g. Bramley, Granny Smith) |
| Not suitable for freezing | 1 tbsp lemon juice |
| 4 large eggs | 3-4 Victoria plums, stones removed |
| 240g caster sugar | Icing sugar |
| 250g butter, melted | |
| 1 tsp vanilla extract | |

- Heat the oven to 180°C (160° fan), 350°F, gas mark 4. Grease a 25cm round cake tin and dust lightly with flour.
- Whisk the eggs with 200g sugar in a mixing bowl until thick and pale. Whisk in the butter and vanilla until blended.
- Sift in the flour and gently fold into the mixture until incorporated.
- Pour the mixture into the cake tin.
- Peel and core the apples and cut into wedges. Sprinkle with lemon juice and the remaining sugar.
- Arrange the apples in neat circles on the cake mixture.
- Halve or quarter the plums, depending on their size, and arrange in a circle, skin side down, in the centre of the tin.
- Bake for 30-40 minutes until golden. Test if it is cooked by inserting a skewer into the cake – it should come out clean.
- Cool in the tin for 10 minutes then sift icing sugar over the cake. Best eaten warm.

trees are not self-fertile and need pollen from a neighbouring tree, in flower at the same time, in order to successfully pollinate and fruit. Each variety has designated pollination groups to help identify possible partners. A few varieties are self-fertile, amongst them Red Devil, James Greeves and Falstaff, mainly modern varieties, which do not quite have the character and personality of heritage apples, but benefit from increased resistance to disease.

THE BEST NATIVE TASTES

Each area has its local hero, a unique and individual apple that goes to make up over 1,200 different varieties that keep us in almost year-round supply. We grow mainly ‘dessert’ apples, or ‘eaters’, as opposed to ‘cookers’ – although Bramley’s Seedling is the most popular cooking apple – as well as crab or cider apples. There is a groundswell of revived affection for heritage varieties, those more than 100 years old. Childhood memories, local produce, organic, slow-food and food-miles movements all collude to promote ‘local’, often irregular or misshapen, but oh-so-tasty heritage apples in favour of glossy, polished and lacklustre supermarket imports. Some of our finest, as selected by David Smyth, chief taster of Copella English Apple Juice, include:

- Cox’s Orange Pippin (1892). Our greatest English dessert apple, with unrivalled richness and aromatic flavour combining pear, melon, mango and orange juice, and distinctive ruddy colouring. Beware of foreign grown Cox’s as their flavour is intrinsic to our climate and soil.
- Laxton’s Superb (Suffolk, 1897). Offspring of the above, this is a delicious crisp, green-flushed-red eating apple with dense flesh and sweet flavour.
- Bramley’s Seedling (Nottinghamshire, 1809). The quintessential English cooking apple, famed for its powerful apple-pie flavour and high acidity, which leaves desserts light, flavoursome and fluffy. It sprung from a pip planted by a girl named Mary Ann Beresford, over 200 years ago.
- Worcestershire Pearmain (Worcestershire, 1873). A September cropper, best eaten on picking and renowned for its lovely strawberry flavour, this is also reflected in its outer colouring.
- Discovery (Essex, 1949). Offspring of the above, this pale pink dessert apple, with a faint hint of strawberry, is ideal for juicing.
- Sturmer Pippin (Suffolk, 1800). An extraordinary green apple which, like wine, improves with age, maturing from sharp in October, to really sweet from February onwards, after storing. ▶

BAKED APPLES

This dish couldn't be simpler. Baking renders the texture of the apples light and fluffy

- Wash and core four medium Bramley cooking apples, or large dessert apples, which need less time in the oven.
- Retain the top of the core to plug the apple for initial baking.
- Place in the oven on a buttered dish, adding a knob of butter and a sprinkling of brown sugar to the core hole before 'plugging'.
- Bake for 20 minutes at 160°C, remove and discard core plug.
- Stuff with dried fruits pre-soaked in brandy, or hedgerow-picked blackberries, if available.
- Sprinkle with more brown sugar and bake for a further 10 minutes, taking care not to overcook.
- Serve warm, delicious with custard, ice-cream or a dollop of double cream.



Combined flavour
Set your apple press up outside on a sturdy table with a receptacle set below to collect the juice. Invite neighbours to bring and combine their apples for the tastiest homemade apple juice.

APPLE JUICE

The best juice is made from fresh, not stored apples, mixing varieties of cookers and desserts for the best flavour. Weather permitting, set up pressing equipment outside as the process can get rather sticky.

Systematically tip clean and healthy apples into the apple crusher, and then transfer to a muslin-lined press. The muslin helps to contain the apples pieces. Turn the press handle and slowly squeeze the juice out into a waiting, clean receptacle. To each litre of golden juice quickly add ascorbic acid (see individual packets for quantity, available from home brew shops) to prevent the juice discolouring and then funnel into sterilised bottles. The juice can be drunk immediately or it can be pasteurised to increase its shelf life to one to two years. ■

CELEBRATE THE SEASON

Apple fairs and festivals are delightful family days out with apple and cider tastings, orchard visits, apple bobbing, longest peel competitions, cookery demonstrations and lots of delicious produce to taste and buy. Designated 'Apple Day' is 21 October, where English apples and their local distinctiveness are celebrated countrywide. To find events near you visit www.commonground.org.uk

SOME FAVOURITES

Brogdale Farm, Faversham, Kent: 24-25 September; 22-23 October. The home of the National Fruit Collection, with over 2,200 (not all English) apples, celebrates with a Cider Festival in September and an October Apple Festival. You can also visit the nursery where a large variety of fruit trees, both heritage and modern, are on offer.
Tel 01795 536250; www.brogdalecollections.co.uk

Blackmoor fruit specialist nursery offers a wide selection of apple varieties and styles.
www.blackmoor.co.uk

Audley End, Saffron Waldon, Essex: 17-18 September. This is a restored Victorian garden with a fine display of expertly trained cordons, fans and espaliered heritage apples and pears. Bring an apple from your own garden for identification on Apple Weekend in September.
Tel 01799 522842; www.english-heritage.org.uk

Waterperry Gardens, Wheatley, Oxfordshire: 7-9 October. This three-day apple event has over 50 apple varieties on show, plus 15 types of Waterperry-produced apple juice and a host of experts to hand.
Tel 01844 339254; www.waterperrygardens.co.uk

R.H.S Taste of Autumn, festival at Wisley, Surrey: 20-23 October. The festival includes apple displays, tastings and apple identifications.
Tel 01483 211113; www.rhs.org.uk

PICK YOUR OWN

Find a farm near you and enjoy harvesting apples for a family day out.
www.pickyourownfarms.org.uk

Royal fruit Farms, Sandringham. Pick English apples including Cox's Orange Pippin, Laxton's Fortune and more, all fit for a king or queen, in the Royal orchards from mid-September through to October. See the website for harvesting details
www.royalfruitfarms.co.uk

Ryton Organic Gardens, Warwickshire. Wassailing and blessing of the apple trees takes place on Sunday 15 January, with Morris dancing, poetry recitals and ceremonial blessing of the apple trees.
www.gardenorganic.org.uk/events/show

READ ON

If looking for inspiration on what to do with a collected windfall of apples, and for a little taste of old England, a recommended book is *The Complete Book of Home Food Preservation* (1947) by Cyril Granges.

To help identify the numerous varieties of English apple, *The Apple Book* by Rosie Sanders (Frances Lincoln, £25) is an invaluable aid. Through beautiful detailed watercolours, Rosie depicts the range of form, colour and texture, accompanied by detailed descriptions and history.

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