



APPLES

The only native, North American apple is the crab apple or wild apple, a member of the Species Malus and the Rose family. These apples grow from seeds and each seed produces a different variety of apple. Each of these seeds contain a unique combination of genes coming from the mother tree and pollen gathered by bees from other apple tree flowers. No two seeds produce the same variety of apple. Johnny Appleseed was a folk hero and apple farmer and the subject of many stories. His real name was John Chapman, 1774-1845, and he was born in Leominster, Mass. He's known to have traveled the countryside collecting apple seeds from farms, cider mills and individual trees, distributing them along the roadways and creating many orchards of wild, distinct apples.

Europeans coming to North America brought "orchard" apple trees that had been grafted, a practice that has been dated to before the 1st century. In grafting, a scion, or small section of a stem with leaf buds, is cut from a selected type of apple and inserted into a healthy root stock of any apple variety. The upper part of the graft, the scion, becomes the top, and type, of the apple tree. The lower part, or understock, becomes the root and trunk. A grafted tree becomes the same variety as the tree the scion was cut from. It is possible to graft several types of scions onto one root stock producing a tree with several varieties of apples. Early orchards in North America had few apples in the trees because honey bees, critical for pollination, were not native to North America. They were imported from England into Virginia and New England in the early 1600's. The apple is one of the most cultivated fruits, originating in Asia, where its wild ancestors grow today.

The apple has been associated with many symbols, sayings and memories. American as apple pie, apple of my eye, an apple a day keeps the doctor away - The Big Apple (NYC), Apple Records, Apple Computer (McIntosh) - Adam and Eve and temptation, Sir Isaac Newton and gravity, Johnny Appleseed and orchards— along with all the smells and tastes of pies, ciders and fresh apples. Apple cider vinegar is anti-bacterial and anti-inflammatory and apples contain anti-oxidants. They have no fat, sodium or cholesterol and are a good source of fiber and vitamin C. Apple wood is dense, durable and fragrant and can be used for making utensils and furniture as well as for grilling and smoking meats and fish, burning hot and slow with little ash. Carbonized remains of apples have been found in prehistoric dwellings, along with evidence of slicing and drying in Stone Age Europe. Apple trees grow from a dwarf 5 feet to a 20 foot height and can live over 200 years, producing crops of apples .

Apple trees go dormant in the colder winter months and this is a good time to prune them. This allows the trees to put their energy into the upcoming crop of fruit. An average tree takes 3-6 years to start to produce apples with full production occurring by 8 years. In

New England apple trees bloom in May, and the flowers are sweet smelling and delicate white, pink or red blossoms pollinated by bees. Apple trees need well drained soil but also moisture during the summer months. The fruit is picked at various times in the fall depending on the variety of apple with some ripening early and others being kept into the winter.

McIntosh, Yellow Delicious, Pippin, Black Oxford, Granny Smith, Honey Crisp, Macoun, Courtland, Red Delicious, Northern Spy – these, and many more, are well known apple varieties that are grown by grafting. Along with all the unnamed wild apples that are in our neighborhoods, fields and roadsides we have many choices of the delicious fruit. Some apples are better for sauce, others for pies, butter or cider and others just for eating. They can be cooked, dried, frozen, sliced, chopped, pressed, baked and blended.

What is your favorite apple or apple recipe? Do you have an overgrown old apple tree in your neighborhood or yard that you could learn to prune back and then watch come to life? Maybe you'll find a variety that has yet to be named. Plant a seed or a grafted tree and enjoy apples for years to come.