

## An Apple a Day!

When I saw a picture of an apple called 'Rhode Island Greening' I was reminded of my mother's insistence on 'greenings' for apple pie. I also remember the small orchards that occupied the spaces behind old Victorian houses fairly close together with deep lots. There were occasionally chickens or a pond to raise frog legs, a Sunday dinner delicacy. Not all positive: a neighbor's gift of frog legs was buried behind the orchard, deep under the compost pile. My grandmother did not allow things that jumped in the frying pan to enter the kitchen.

It was good to read recently that some stubborn apple eaters are determined to bring back the apples that put apple pie up there with motherhood in America's hierarchy. We often read that there were literally thousands of varieties of apples at the time of the Civil War. It is hard to understand why they lost favor to species with less flavor, but, when growing apples was no longer a local concern, the apple's ability to withstand long distance shipping and months of cold storage made growing more delicate species economically risky. Do you suppose the recent explosion of farmer's markets will presage the return of some of the heritage apples?

Another thing I remember about the apple trees I knew as a child is that they were not seedlings but rooted clippings or a slip of one kind was grafted into a branch of another. Apple trees do not come true from seed so if a modern Johnny (Chapman) Appleseed were to scatter seeds about our counties who knows what would appear?

About grafting: a slip of a wanted variety is grafted onto a living rootstock and one variety will dominate an entire orchard. It is easier to pick and ship apples that all ripen at the same time, of the same size, requiring the same nutrients, needing the same spraying, pruning, thinning schedule. Of course it is also easier for specific pests or diseases to attack such a monoculture.

In earlier times, many of the casual seedlings would have ended as firewood, not pies and many would have been turned into cider. Cider was not the apple juice designed for children's Halloween parties but a fine alternative to beer or wine. In Colonial America it was fermented from apples not tasty enough for the table and was considered safer than water and more easily produced than wine. One famous apple, the 'Harrison' was reputed in the early 1800s to make a cider as elegant as Champagne. The fine hard cider disappeared during the years of prohibition, except as a domestic product like elderberry wine and after that experiment in legislated morality was repealed, beer was readily available.

For the home gardener, the catalogs are full of enticing apples to try for pies or cider. After all, if your garden needs a tree, why not plant something so good to eat as an apple! Not only do they have fragrant spring flowers but they can live a hundred years so won't need replanting any time soon. Catalogs offer a single tree with as many as five varieties on it; some are dwarf and will bear in a few years. Imagine Red and Golden Delicious, Jonathan, Yates, and Winesap all on one tree! Territorial Seed.com offers a dwarf, 'Honeycrisp', an introduction from the University of Minnesota, ripening in early September and storing well. Even though it survives extreme cold, it might be worth a try here.

Breeders of fruit that prefer cooler weather will be working diligently to develop species that will survive global warming. They are both scientists and businessmen concerned with protecting a profitable industry and smart enough to know their enterprises adapt or die. In studying the catalogs you will notice that some trees are grafted on rootstock that will withstand hot humid summers. Newer trees are promoted as being resistant to cedar apple rust, a fungus

that flourishes here. Others featured are historical Virginia apples listed in Va. Tech's Master Gardener handbook, tart/sweet 'Gravenstein' and huge 'Wolf River', for example.

**DID YOU KNOW**

- there is a gathering of Virginians for Action on Climate Change in Richmond Sunday, April 14. For details see [vasierraclub.org](http://vasierraclub.org).
- a reader reminds flower enthusiasts that, beginning April 16, there will be an exhibit of art featuring garden subjects by local artists at Gloucester Arts on Main, 12 to 6, Tuesday through Saturday.

11 Apr 13