

APPLE LOVE

Who doesn't love apples? From eating raw to the myriad of products that we turn them into. You're lucky to find a half dozen varieties in your local supermarket, which is why you go to Farmer's Markets and seek out local apple farmers. Sonoma County Farm Trails offers an Apple Trail map on its website to help with our exploration. My two favorite farms are Walker Apples in Graton and The Apple Farm in Philo in Mendocino County. Both offer more than 50 varieties throughout the season.

Though we love the saying "there is nothing more American than Apple Pie" the truth is that the pie wasn't developed here, and neither were most apples most of which came from China and middle Europe. There are more than 7500 varieties of apples worldwide with 2500 varieties in the U.S. and more are coming every year. China is the largest producer, with the U.S. second but they grow all over the place. For example, in Ecuador, the trees have acclimated to the high mountains where they can produce two crops in a year.

Apple lore is full of mythological and religious significance, from erotic love to sinful seduction. Norse and Germanic gods of fertility were associated with the fruit and golden apples appear often in Greek mythology, mostly as a declaration of love and a symbol of desire and destruction. The infamous forbidden fruit in Genesis came to be known as "Apple" because the Latin words *mālum* (apple) and *mālum* (bad) are usually written without accents. Until the 1600s apple was a pretty generic term for all foreign fruit and nuts, so who knows what some of these folks were referring to.

A few apple facts that you might find interesting:

- **Apples are America's second favorite fruit.**
We consume over 19 pounds of whole apples per year, and over 50 pounds of a combination of fresh apples and apple products (applesauce, juice, and more). It's a close second to the banana — we eat an average of 28 pounds of them a year.
- **The apples you're buying could be up to one year old.**
But don't worry, totally safe. They are best when freshly picked but farmers use cool technology called "controlled atmosphere storage". This allows them to control the temperature and ozone where apples are stored so that they can be delivered to you fresh and crisp throughout most of the year. At home, keep apples as cold as possible. Put them in a paper bag and tuck them into the coldest part of the refrigerator (usually the back of the bottom drawer).
- **Eating apples can aid in brightening teeth.**
While not a substitute for toothpaste, the acid in apples actually helps clean and brighten teeth. The crunchy inside also acts like a mini toothbrush that can scrub away stains.
- **The apple is the official fruit of six states:** Minnesota, New York, Vermont, Washington, West Virginia, and Illinois.
- **The most-grown apple is Red Delicious.**
Followed by Gala, Golden Delicious, Granny Smith, and Fuji.

- **Apples can help ripen other fruit.**
Apples give off ethylene gas that accelerates ripening. You can place unripe avocados, tomatoes, bananas and more in a bag with one apple to ripen them in a day or two.
- **Sir Isaac Newton in 1665** watched an apple fall to the ground and, wondering why it fell in a straight line, was inspired to discover the laws of gravitation and motion.

We tend to think of apples as being used mostly in sweet recipes, but they also have a delicious place with savorys too. Here are some of my favorite recipes featuring both.

APPLE-HERB VICHYSOISE

Serves 6 - 8

One of the first “serious” cookbooks I remember acquiring was Chef Albert Stockli’s cookbook published after he had retired from Restaurant 21 in New York City. He was a fan of vichyssoise - - so this recipe is in remembrance of him!

1-1/2 cups chopped leeks, white part only
 1/2 cup chopped onions
 1/4 cup chopped celery
 1 pound peeled, cored and chopped tart-sweet apples, such as MacIntosh or Gravenstein
 1 tablespoon olive oil
 1/2 pound peeled and chopped potatoes
 2-1/2 cups rich vegetable stock or chicken stock
 1/2 cup dry white wine
 1/4 cup apple brandy, such as Calvados, or 2 tablespoons dry sherry
 1-1/2 cups half and half
 2 tablespoons minced fresh chives plus more for garnish
 1 tablespoon minced fresh tarragon
 1 teaspoon minced fresh mint
 Salt and freshly ground white pepper

In a large stockpot, heat the olive oil. Add the leeks, onions, celery, and half of the apples and sauté until soft but not brown. Add the potato, stock and wine. Simmer, partially covered, until vegetables are very soft. Remove from the heat. Add the Calvados and the remaining apples. Transfer to a blender and puree, in batches if necessary, until very smooth. Strain through a fine mesh strainer. Add the half and half and the herbs. Refrigerate until well chilled. Correct the seasoning with salt and pepper.

To serve, ladle into chilled soup bowls. Garnish with finely chopped chives.



APPLE JACK SANDWICH

Serves 2

This simple recipe was one of the favorite lunch dishes at the original *John Ash & Co.* restaurant. I also do this as a simple appetizer cutting the sandwich into little squares. As a sandwich, I'd serve it with a salad of tender young spicy greens dressed with a little vinaigrette on the side or sometimes right on top of this open-face sandwich. The "jack" part of this of course used our local jack cheese. My favorite for this is the one made by the Vella Cheese Company in Sonoma www.vellacheese.com called "Mezzoseco". It has a little age on it, which contributes a wonderful nutty flavor. Remember that curry powders vary widely in flavor and power. Use your favorite and adjust to your own taste.

1/4 cup mayonnaise

2 teaspoons honey

1 teaspoon Dijon mustard

1/2 teaspoon curry powder (or to taste)

4 slices good whole grain bread, lightly toasted

2 medium firm apples such as Gala or Empire; peeled, cored and sliced into thin wedges

6 ounces or so thickly sliced California Jack cheese

Combine the mayonnaise, honey, mustard and curry together to make a smooth mixture. Liberally spread on the bread slices and top with the apples, arranging attractively. Lay cheese over this and place under a hot broiler for a couple of minutes to melt the cheese. Serve immediately.

APPLE CHICKEN LIVER MOUSSE

Makes about 2 cups

I love the rich velvety texture and taste of this recipe. The addition of the apples offers nice sweetness and texture. One of my favorite uses is to spread on crisp croutes and then use them to top a crisp salad. This is best made a few hours ahead of time for the flavors to bloom.

5 tablespoons unsalted butter

1 small tart sweet apple such as Golden Delicious, peeled, cored and cut into 1/4-inch dice

1/4 cup Calvados or another Brandy

1/2 cup finely chopped shallots

1 tablespoon finely chopped garlic

1 pound chicken livers trimmed of any veins and gristle and halved

Sea salt and freshly ground white pepper

1/4 teaspoon ground allspice

2 tablespoons finely grated orange zest (use a microplane)

Heat two tablespoons of the butter in a heavy skillet and sauté the apples over high heat until they color a bit but still retain their shape. Add the Calvados and cook for another minute or so and then set aside in a small bowl to cool.

Add remaining butter to a clean sauté pan and over moderate heat cook shallots and garlic until softened but not brown, about 4 minutes. Pat chicken livers dry and season with salt and pepper. Add to pan and cook, stirring and turning occasionally, until livers are barely cooked through but still slightly pink inside, about 8 minutes.

Transfer liver mixture to a food processor along with any juices from the apples, along with the allspice and orange zest and puree until very smooth. Season to your taste with salt and pepper. Stir apples into mixture and pack into a crock or terrine, cover surface with plastic wrap and chill for at least 2 hours. Will keep covered and refrigerated for up to 5 days. Remove from refrigerator at least 30 minutes before serving.

Note: If you are going to unmold the parfait to slice, be sure to line the mold with plastic wrap, making it much easier to remove. If cutting into slices, uses a hot knife.



SALAD OF FRISEE, APPLES, BLUE CHEESE WITH A MAPLE VINAIGRETTE

Serves 4

This is a simple salad to make but it has great flavor. You could substitute other fruits for the apples such as ripe pears, fuyu persimmons, etc. and other greens if you can't find frisée which is also known as curly endive.

1 medium-head tender frisée, about 10 ounces

1 small tart apple such as Pippin or Granny Smith; peeled, seeded, and cut into julienne

4 - 6 ounces of blue cheese such as Point Reyes Bay Blue, thickly sliced

Maple Vinaigrette (recipe follows)

Remove and discard the dark green outer leaves of the frisée and separate the pale-yellow inner leaves. Wash, spin dry and set aside.

Toss the frisée with a tablespoon or two of the vinaigrette and arrange on 4 chilled plates. Attractively arrange the apples, blue cheese, and bacon around. Drizzle remaining vinaigrette over and serve immediately with a grinding or two of freshly ground black pepper.

Maple Vinaigrette

Makes 1/2 cup

This is a delicious vinaigrette that incorporates some of my favorite Fall and Winter flavors. It is particularly good over salads of hearty or bitter greens. Try it on a combination of baby spinach, arugula, and radicchio with some chunks of caramelized apple and toasted walnuts as a garnish.

2 tablespoons maple syrup
1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
2 teaspoons finely chopped shallot
2 tablespoons apple cider vinegar
5 tablespoons toasted walnut oil
Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

Heat the maple syrup slightly in the microwave or on top of the stove and then whisk in the mustard, shallot and vinegar. Continue to whisk and slowly drizzle in the walnut oil to form a light emulsion. Season with salt and pepper. Store covered in refrigerator for up to 3 days.



WINTER FRUIT CHUTNEY

Makes about 1 quart

This chutney is a delicious accompaniment to smoked and roasted meats, sausages and poultry and as an accompaniment to cheese.

1- 750ml bottle of dry white wine such as Sauvignon Blanc or Pinot Grigio
3/4 cup sugar
3 whole star anise
2 bay leaves
1 tablespoon coriander seed, slightly crushed
1 tablespoon black peppercorns, slightly crushed
1 cup raisins (preferably golden, unbleached)
3/4 pound assorted dried fruits such as apricots, cherries, mangoes and/or figs coarsely chopped
3 tablespoons minced candied ginger
1 large tart fresh apple such as Jonathan or McIntosh, peeled, cored and cut into 1-inch chunks
3 tablespoons fresh lime or lemon juice

Add wine, sugar and spices to a non-aluminum pan and simmer uncovered over moderate heat for 10 minutes. Off-heat and let it cool. Strain or not discarding spices if you decide to. You should have about 2-1/2 cups of strained liquid. Return liquid to the pan and add raisins, dried fruits and candied ginger and simmer covered for 5 minutes. Add the fresh apples and simmer gently until they are just tender, about 3 minutes. Off heat and cool. Stir in lime juice.

Store covered in the refrigerator for several weeks. Serve at room temperature for the best flavor.

APPLE, SAGE, AND SAUSAGE STUFFING

Makes 10 cups

Yes, your Thanksgiving turkey can be stuffed with this. I prefer the stuffing baked separately in a buttered dish to maximize the crispy edges. This is also a great accompaniment to roast pork, ham or chicken.

8 tablespoons unsalted butter plus more to butter the dish
3 ribs celery, chopped
1 medium onion, chopped
3 sweet Italian pork sausages, casings removed (about 1 pound)
3 tart-sweet apples such as McIntosh, peeled cored and chopped

1 loaf peasant white bread such as Pan de Mie, crusts cut off and cut into 1/2" cubes and toasted (about 8 cups)

2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh sage (2 teaspoons dried)

2 cups chicken stock, storebought or homemade

Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste

Heat oven to 375°. Melt butter in a 12" skillet over medium-high heat. Add celery and onion; cook until soft, about 10 minutes. Add sausage and cook, using a wooden spoon to break it into small pieces, until browned, 5 minutes. Add apples and continue cooking until softened, 5–7 minutes more. Stir in breadcrumbs and sage; add chicken stock and season with salt and pepper.

Stuff into turkey cavity; place remaining stuffing in a buttered baking dish and bake until golden on top, 20–25 minutes.



UPSIDE-DOWN APPLE CAKE

Makes one 9-inch round cake

3 tablespoons unsalted butter plus more for buttering the pie plate
2 generous cups tart green apples such as Granny Smith, peeled and sliced
1/3 cup honey such as orange blossom
1/8 teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
Grated zest and juice of one medium lemon
1 tablespoon plus one cup of unbleached flour
1/2 cup sugar
1 teaspoon baking powder
1/4 teaspoon kosher salt
1/4 cup milk
1 egg plus 1 egg yolk
1 teaspoon vanilla
Lightly sweetened whipped cream to top

Butter a 9-inch pie plate generously. Place the apple slices in a large bowl. In a small bowl combine the honey, nutmeg, lemon zest and juice and 1 tablespoon of flour until smooth and pour over the apples, stirring to coat all the slices.

Arrange the apple slices in a neat circle on the bottom of the pie plate, pouring any of the honey mixture left in the bowl over them. Dot with 2 tablespoons of butter.

Preheat oven to 425°. Sift together the remaining 1 cup of flour, sugar, baking powder and salt into a small mixing bowl. In a measuring cup combine the milk, egg and yolk, vanilla and the remaining tablespoon of butter, melted. Add to the dry ingredients and stir until well blended. Carefully spread the batter over the apples. Bake for 25 - 30 minutes or until the top is browned and the fruit is bubbling. Cool in the pie plate for 5 minutes then reverse onto a platter a bit larger than the plate. Serve with lightly sweetened whipped cream, if desired.

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