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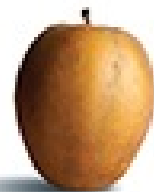


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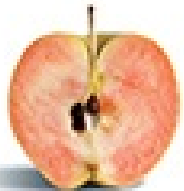


L O V E R ' S

C O O K B O O K



AMY TRAVERSO





Pork and Apple Pie with Cheddar-Sage Crust ([page 129](#))

The Apple Lover's Cookbook



AMY TRAVERSO

photographs by Squire Fox



W. W. Norton & Company

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DEDICATION

• For Scott, Max, and Eva •

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INTRODUCTION



Calville Blanc d'Hiver

Why an Apple Book?

“So . . . you must like apples.”

Tell a stranger at a cocktail party that you’re a food writer working on an apple cookbook, and that’s the response you’ll likely get. And, of course, one would hope that the answer is yes, I do, very much. In fact, the more I’ve eaten them, cooked with them, learned their history, and studied their intricacies, the more passionate I’ve become.

Sometimes the conversation ends there—not everyone finds fruit so fascinating. But if it continues, the topic usually turns to favorite varieties—mine (Pink Pearl and Calville Blanc d’Hiver) and theirs (Honeycrisp is popular, as is Gala, with a few still holding fast to Red Delicious)—which almost always sparks memories of a favorite childhood recipe. “Oh,” they say, “My mom used to make the *best* apple crisp . . .”

I enjoy these conversations because it’s nice to know that I’m not alone in my enthusiasm. In the years I’ve spent working on this book, I’ve discovered that apples are not only tasty, but infinitely varied and intrinsically connected to human history. They’re the world’s third most widely grown fruit (bananas are first, grapes second). In this country, they’re grown commercially in thirty-five states and home orchards can be found from Alaska to Florida, where the variety Tropic Sweet was developed at the state university. Apples have been a window through which my knowledge of food has deepened. I hope that the more time you spend with this book, the more passionate you’ll become as well.

I wasn’t always such an apple enthusiast. I grew up in Connecticut, enjoying the fruit in the way most children. I snacked on a McIntosh or Red Delicious when there weren’t any Oreos on offer. I looked forward to fall, when my mother made my grandmother’s apple crisp ([page 185](#)). We made an annual apple-picking trek to nearby Glastonbury, where a handful of family-run orchards still continues to resist suburban development.

And somewhere in that very conventional introduction, apples took root in my imagination. I saw the lush beauty of an orchard at full fruit, and understood why so much early literature, from the Bible to Greek and Scandinavian mythology, equates the orchard with Paradise itself. To me, an apple farm

in September or October represents everything that is inspiring in nature—its abundance and sweetness—and strikes me as a spiritual setting as much as any church or temple. Setting aside the centuries of decidedly human effort that gave rise to these highly selected fruits—and forgetting that orchards don't exactly plant themselves—walking among these trees gives the most pleasing vision of nature, in which sweet fruit is given in abundance as if by some universal benevolence.

After I left home and began exploring food and cooking as a serious hobby, and later as a food editor and recipe developer, I experimented with apple varieties outside my narrow circle of McIntosh, Macoun, Granny Smith, and Golden Delicious, and found breeds that seemed almost exotic—the sweet yellow Winter Banana, the tart and rough-skinned Roxbury Russet. Here was a fruit that thrived in my northern home state—where remnants of former orchards can be found in most cities and suburban towns. In fact, I often snack from several scraggly survivors in my urban Brookline, Massachusetts, neighborhood.

Apples are so adaptable and grow in so many places that they provide an easy way to eat local and in season, and to support nearby farms instead of relying only on fruit shipped in from far away. All worthy goals, with more and more popular appeal—just look at the farmers' markets sprouting up all over the country. For those of us who live in regions with short growing seasons, locally grown apples aren't just delicious, they're politically correct!

Even far from any orchard, the average shopper has access to an incredible diversity of apple varieties—something rare on a mass scale. Consider the typical supermarket's produce section: you can buy plain “raspberries,” “nectarines,” or “lemons.” For all the tons of strawberries grown year-round in California and Florida, the fruits are still known only by their generic names. Head over to the apple section, however, and you can choose from Granny Smith, Pink Lady, Fuji, and Gala, among others. Only apples have earned such specific interest.

Why? Because in addition to being highly available, apples are delicious, with the sort of tart-sweet balance that delights the palate. They keep well—in my refrigerator's produce drawer, I've successfully stored Newtown Pippin and Northern Spy well into spring (for best results, put them in a paper bag or a plastic bag into which you've punched a few holes). And they're easy to cook with, shining in preparations sweet and savory, fresh and baked.

My own love affair with this fruit hit new highs (and perhaps went overboard) when, on October 1, 2004, I married my husband, Scott, in the apple orchard of Arrows Restaurant in Ogunquit, Maine. As our guests arrived, we served them cider made from the fruit of the trees around us. At the reception, we set small wedding cakes on each table and scattered tiny Lady Apples around them as an edible centerpiece. My bridesmaids wore shades of red and rose, like the blush on the fruit, and Scott and his groomsmen sported apple-green ties. My friend Gil even designed an apple tree logo for the invitations and programs. The wedding favors? Caramel apples. Really, it was a harvest festival disguised as a wedding. And naturally, when our son, Max, began talking, he called every fruit an “apple.”

My passion for apples has shaped my work life as well. As a food writer and editor, I've seen how popular apples are with readers. Every fall, at magazines from California to New England, my job has been to develop great apple recipes. All of these experiences have brought me to this cookbook. I love this fruit. I love how it represents home and autumn and big slabs of pie, and I love cooking with it.

Chances are, apples have a place in your own food memories. I can't think of another fruit that comes as close to the heart of the American table. We save an apple for the teacher. We eat an apple a day. We are “as American as apple pie” (an ironic statement, if you think about it, given that apple pie really is very British), and we call our greatest city the Big Apple. Some combination of those phrases

and a thousand servings of apple cider donuts and mulled cider, combined with my New England root beer or your Virginia or Sonoma or Yakima Valley childhood, and all those rounds of the John Appleseed song (“*Oh, the Lord is good to me . . .*”), all add up to such strong associations with apples and America that I half expected to hear that the Pilgrims found rows of Baldwin and McIntosh when they first stepped ashore at Plymouth.

In reality, the sweet apple we associate with home and country had to travel through time and across the world before it could become a homegrown favorite. Let’s go back to the beginning and find out how we got here . . .

A Brief History of the Apple

America’s first apple trees were planted from seeds, cuttings, and small plants brought by the Jamestown settlers to the New World in the early 1600s. The Pilgrims planted their orchards soon after. But going back much farther, before recorded human history, we find the origin of the modern domesticated apple, *Malus domestica*, deep in the southeastern corner of Kazakhstan, along the Tien Shan mountain range, which borders Kazakhstan, China, and Kyrgyzstan. The Tien Shan’s forests are still filled with ancient groves of wild apple and other fruit trees. They grow as high as fifty feet, with fruit ranging in size from tiny walnut-shaped fruitlets to enormous globes, and in every color from yellow to deep violet.

It was here and in another nearby mountain range, the Dzungarian range, that the ancestors of today’s sweet table apples first appeared about 4.5 million years ago—the result of an evolutionary dance between the native wild apple trees—botanical name *Malus sieversii*—and the mountain birds and animals who favored the fleshiest, most honeyed fruits on offer, and then distributed the seeds far and wide. It was natural selection at its finest, allowing the fruits with the highest sugar levels to come to dominate their habitat.

Of course, the apple genus, *Malus*, is a large one, and there were other, less palatable types of apples growing in the world at this time. More than thirty other native species can be found in every corner of the globe: the small, bitter crab apples of Europe, Chinese crabs, native American crabs. These apples have all been known and used by humans throughout history, but it is the large, honeyed *Malus sieversii* that most resemble today’s orchard apples. So how did they become today’s McIntosh and Gala? How did they get from there to here?

The simplest answer is that the Tien Shan forests happened to lie in the path of ancient trade routes. Travelers encountered the fruit on their journey and, like the bears and birds before them, carried apples out beyond their home turf. Imagine how wonderful an apple might have seemed to those early travelers, who were hard-wired like all humans to crave sweet things, and lived in a world before cane sugar or high-fructose corn syrup. Here was a sweet food that was portable and could be stored for relatively long periods.

Apples are also extremely adaptive plants. Different varieties easily hybridize with each other, and sweet apples can also exchange DNA with crab apple species. As apples from the East moved west and mingled with the native crabs, their offspring could fold in genes from each new habitat, allowing them to cope with cold weather, heat, drought—any number of threats. This adaptability allowed apples to thrive in an incredible range of environments—a wide area of the planet’s temperate zone.

with the right balance of warm and cold weather.

It's no surprise, then, that as humans began mastering the basics of agriculture, they began cultivating orchards. By 2000 BC, the ancient Hittites, who lived in the lands that now comprise Turkey, were growing apples. And by about 500 BC, apples had found a place of honor in Persian culture and cuisine.

The apples themselves were improving. By 300 BC, Greek farmers were practicing the technique of grafting (see [page 90](#)), branches (scions) onto hearty trunks (rootstock). Now they could select their favorite apple and clone it directly, rather than relying on the more random process of planting a tree from seed and waiting a few years to see what kind of fruit came up.

Soon, sweet apples were spreading all over the lands we now call southern Europe, and then farther north as the Roman Empire grew. They were prized by wealthy landowners and featured in the cuisines of the time. They were woven into some of the most famous Greek and Roman myths—even playing a role in the start of the Trojan War. In that story, Eris, the Greek goddess of discord, was denied an invitation to a wedding on Mount Olympus and retaliated by lobbing a golden apple inscribed with the words “To the fairest” into the middle of the party. This caused a ruckus among the proud and beautiful goddesses Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite. Paris of Troy stepped in as mediator and Aphrodite won the contest by bribing him with the hand of Helen of Sparta. And the rest was mythic history.

The association of apples with romance, beauty, temptation, immortality, and sensuality is a theme in cultures all over the globe. In Norse, Icelandic, Babylonian, Celtic, and Roman myths, we see gods eating apples to preserve their immortality, and suitors using apples to achieve a conquest, women conceiving with the help of magical apples, and heroes falling from grace because they couldn't resist the temptation of a perfect fruit.

Which brings us to Adam and Eve. In the original Hebrew text of Genesis, the specific fruit that led to man's downfall isn't actually named. Greek and Latin translations used the word *melon* and *malum*, respectively, which could refer to either “fruit” in general or “apples” specifically. Considering the geography of the region where the story is set, a fig, apricot, or pomegranate would seem the most likely culprit. But over time, the apple was chosen, perhaps because it was a well-known fruit of the northern monks who later translated the Bible into Latin. Perhaps it was the time-honored practice of interweaving ancient myths with “new” religions to create a story that the locals could accept. Or maybe it was the perfect pentagram shape formed by apple seeds when sliced horizontally (slice the apple from stem to flower end, and the shape resembles a womb). In any case, the apple was implicated and has remained the symbol for temptation ever since. In 1470, when Flemish artist Hugo van der Goes painted his famous *Fall of Man*, in which Adam and Eve consorted with the devil under an apple tree, the popular association of the apple with the original Tree of the Fruit of Knowledge was fixed in oil.

Despite this stain on its reputation, the apple's fortunes improved in northern Europe, where it thrived in its cooler climate. And as the Renaissance ushered in a period of scientific discovery, the field of botany emerged. That effort to systematize and categorize the natural world spurred further attempts to identify exceptional apple varieties and propagate them. During this time, French varieties such as the Pomme d'Api, the Reinette, and, my favorite, the Calville Blanc d'Hiver, became popular—and are still in demand today. Likewise, in England, with the Rennet, the Pippin, the Pearmain, and the Costard. The British Puritans of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries held fast to the virtues of thrift and self-sufficiency, so orchard-keeping became a common practice. And when they left England for America, they took apples with them.

~~In Jamestown, in 1629, Captain John Smith wrote of peaches, apples, apricots, and figs that “prosper[ed] exceedingly” in the coastal climate. Around the same time, the first new American apple variety was given the name Blaxton’s Yellow Sweeting. It came from a Boston orchard around 1625, a product of the Beacon Hill estate of William Blaxton, the first British settler in Boston. He was chaplain to the 1623 Gorges expedition, which preceded the Puritans to the particular spot by several years. And as he was not a Puritan, he soon suffered repeated skirmishes with his newly arrived fundamentalist neighbors before relocating to more tolerant Rhode Island. Today, at the corner of Beacon and Spruce streets, you can find a plaque marking Blaxton’s old homestead.~~

Not long after his success, someone—it’s not clear who—discovered a sweet russeted green apple growing in a field in Roxbury, south of Boston, and liked it well enough to propagate it. This became the Roxbury Russet apple, which is still in active production today.

For early colonists, apples weren’t just a sweet table fruit. They were the source of cider vinegar, which was used in preserving. They provided hard apple cider to drink, and from cider came distilled ciderjack, which was used as a spirit, a preservative, and an anesthetic. By 1775, 10 percent of farms in New England boasted a cider mill. Soon there were orchards lining the Eastern Seaboard, as far south as northern Georgia. And as apples began to grow abundantly, they became a staple of American cooking.

With American independence in 1776, the westward migration began, and apples traveled right along with the early settlers. Homesteading laws required that they plant fifty apple or pear trees in order to take title to the land. It was a good way to ensure that people stayed put long enough to see those trees bear fruit.

And so, in the early 1800s, a young missionary named John Chapman left Massachusetts and headed west by canoe into the nascent territories of Pennsylvania, Ohio, West Virginia, Illinois, and Indiana to preach the Good Word and spread the gospel of apples. He planted trees everywhere he went, eventually earning the nickname Johnny Appleseed.

In the popular depiction of Appleseed, familiar to most schoolchildren or fans of the 1948 Disney short *Johnny Appleseed* (watch it on YouTube—it’s terrific), he’s presented as our country’s crazy great-great-great-uncle: a lovable eccentric who spent his happiest childhood days in his father’s orchard learning how to cultivate the fruit. When he hit the trail, he traveled barefoot and clad in a coffee sack, fearing that shoes would dull his sensitivity to the nature all around him. He was a vegetarian proto-Transcendentalist and Swedenborgian missionary, who, in the tradition of his church, believed that nature was a manifestation of God himself. Therefore, time spent communing with nature was in essence a form of worship.

But Chapman wasn’t one to pass his days meditating under a Baldwin tree. He had a plan: to travel a bit ahead of the settlers and clear plots of land for planting orchards. He’d build fences around them, then persuade a neighbor to tend to the land in exchange for a cut of his sales. He knew that once his trees matured and the hordes arrived, they’d need those trees for their own plots. Of course, he often sold them on credit and was never repaid—he seemed more interested in the planting than in actually making a profit. But by claiming land in this way, Chapman had such vast holdings by the time he died, that he was, at least on paper, a very wealthy man.

Interestingly, Chapman generally held a firm anti-grafting line, considering such human interference an affront to God’s natural order. Though grafting had been practiced since the country’s founding, the thousands of American acres Chapman covered with apple orchards were grown from

seeds that he collected from cider mills along his route. He knew that most of the apples they produce would prove wholly unappetizing as eaters. But they would make a decent cider, which was after all, the most widely consumed beverage of that period. The settlers who planted their three or five or twenty acres of apples were guaranteed, in time, ample sources of mildly boozy refreshment and, they hoped, a few seedlings that would turn up pie-worthy fruit. And they sometimes did. From the hundreds of thousands of seedlings planted during the nineteenth century, many thousand edible hybrids emerged: the Jonathan, the Grimes Golden, the King David, the Maiden Blush, the Blenheim Pearmain, the Ben Davis, to name just a handful. Other varieties from that time were produced by industrious farmers who had the skill to cross hybrids under controlled conditions. But random chance accounted for most of the breeds, the best of which were given the poetic names that indicate just how prized they were.

Interest in apples ran so high during the nineteenth century that the era had many of the traits of the Gold Rush. Discovering a particularly appealing apple variety could bring sudden riches to an enterprising farmer able to market and distribute the scion, and people scoured rural orchards in search of the next Baldwin or Newtown Pippin. During this period, Thoreau wrote, “Every wild-apple shrub excites our expectation thus, somewhat as every wild child. It is, perhaps, a prince in disguise. What a lesson to man!”

All this planting gave the apple a tremendous opportunity to express itself in all its genetic diversity. According to the nurseryman and apple historian Tim Hensley in the book *The Best Apples to Buy and Grow*, the United States Department of Agriculture produced a catalog in 1905 of all the known apple varieties grown domestically during the previous century. Their total: 14,000. It’s an incredible number, especially when you remember that there were no domesticated apples being grown on our soil in 1607, when the Jamestown settlers arrived.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, large-scale apple production expanded from New England, New York, and Ohio to Washington and Oregon. The first apples were planted in that region in the mid-1820s, when a British officer for the Hudson Bay Company named Aemilius Simpson brought apple seeds to Fort Vancouver in Washington. When covered wagons traveled over the Oregon Trail westward in the mid-1800s, they carried apple trees and scion wood for grafting as part of their cargo. With ample irrigation from western rivers, the dry, sunny climate of inland California and central and eastern Oregon and Washington proved excellent for growing vast stores of apples.

But in a blow to apple diversity, the cider era came to an end in this country in the latter half of the nineteenth century, thanks to the double blow of the Temperance Movement with its wholesale rejection of cider and other alcohol, and the arrival of German immigrants who brought with them improved methods for making beers and ales. No longer reliant on apples to produce their drink of choice, Americans who did consume alcohol were less eager to maintain orchards. Today, the word “cider” has come to describe nonalcoholic apple juice, while “hard” cider has become a special beverage made by a small (though growing) number of cideries, mostly in the Northeast, upper Midwest, and Northwest. Meanwhile, as the apple-growing industry grew and centralized, it began to focus its efforts on a smaller number of sweet, productive, transportable apple varieties and many homelier or less hardy types were forgotten.

Today, Washington is by far the top apple-growing state, accounting for 58 percent of the country’s harvest (see [page 182](#)). But the apple industry is a global one, with growers and botanists—most notably those in the United States, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand—continuing to create new blockbuster breeds like the Jazz and Pink Lady, mostly by crossing choice varieties to produce new hybrids. Attempts to improve apples through genetic engineering—by, say, splicing genes from

fungus-resistant crab apple into a domesticated fruit—are still in the relatively early stages (see [page 24](#)). Chance seedlings are also still discovered on occasion—one example: the Ambrosia from British Columbia (see [page 31](#))—but in the global apple economy, very little is left to chance.

In the early 1990s, China overtook the United States in apple production, and it now grows about 35 percent of the world's crop (most of the fruit that enters the United States does so in the form of apple juice concentrate). Thousands of years after the first sweet apples made their way along ancient eastern trade routes to satisfy the world's hunger, that same hunger has spawned a thriving new industry back at their source.



Two Black Oxford apples, one large, one small, from John Bunker's orchard in Palermo, Maine. This firm-sweet variety is a Maine native, and its singularity inspired Bunker to devote his career to preserving heirlooms like this. For more on Bunker and his work, see [page 224](#).

THE WILD WORLD OF APPLE GENETICS

Before I began researching this book, I thought that if you wanted to grow a Granny Smith tree, you could simply take a seed from a supermarket apple and plant it. Easy!

Only . . . not so easy. Apple trees don't produce little seedling clones. Instead, like humans, they produce offspring whose DNA is a unique combination of parental genes. This means that just as my son is not an exact replica of me or his father, any seed I might plant from the Granny Smith will produce a seedling quite distinct from the parent tree. Actually, that seedling will be even *more* distinct than a human child because apple genetics are mind-bogglingly complex—so much so that according to the science writer Sue Hubbell in her book *Shrinking the Cat: Genetic Engineering Before We Knew About Genes*, early botanists who studied apple reproduction “suggested that they do not obey the rules of Mendelian genetics.”

It's easy to understand why they were baffled. Consider the matter of pollen. With few exceptions, apple trees can't fertilize themselves, so they must be fertilized by another tree. In a typical orchard setting during the apple blossom season (spring in the Northern Hemisphere, fall in the Southern Hemisphere), the pollen might travel by honeybee or on the wind, but regardless of how it arrives, it will land on a flower, attach to the sticky stigmas, and travel down the five antenna-like styles to reach the five ovules, each of which will eventually produce seeds.

Now, in an orchard filled with many varieties of apple, there's a lot of different pollen floating around. It's possible that on any particular apple blossom, each stigma could receive pollen from a different source. Therefore, each seed in the very same apple could have a different “father,” and thus a unique genetic makeup.

“There's a tremendous amount of genetic recombination in apples,” says Dr. Susan Brown, Professor of Horticultural Sciences at Cornell's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. Recombination is the process by which strands of DNA can break apart, mix and mingle with other strands, and combine to form new chromosomes. “There are also hidden and recessive genes in apples which may or may not express themselves in different conditions,” Brown says. “There are just many more variables than there are with humans.”

Think of an apple tree in a large orchard, loaded with fruit, each globe possessed of multiple seeds. Between the recessive genes and the recombining genes and the multiple pollen sources, every single apple seed on that tree—and in creation—could represent its own individual hybrid. A whole new kind of apple. See? Mind-boggling.

This is all to the dismay of apple farmers through the centuries. Apples have a very long evolutionary history, and they carry within their genetic code more instructions for survival traits (cold tolerance, disease resistance, etc.) than for sweetness and satiny red skin. As with slot machines, most pulls of the genetic lever result in what is, from our perspective, a dud: bitter, mealy flesh, leathery skin, tiny size. It's extremely rare for an apple tree grown from seed to produce fruit with a narrow band of human-approved traits. So in order to keep propagating the luscious, sweet

Spitzenburg and Gala, humans have had to master the art of grafting—fusing branches from, say, a McIntosh tree onto the trunk of another tree, called the rootstock, which is chosen for its hardiness and disease resistance (for more on grafting, see [page 90](#)). Botanists also continue to develop new breeds by making controlled crosses—hand-transferring pollen from a prized apple variety like a Cox Orange Pippin to the blossoms of, say, a Golden Delicious tree to try to produce offspring that bear the best qualities of both parents.

Recently, apples have entered the world of genetic engineering, in which desirable genes can be identified, retrieved, and introduced to an existing apple plant to make it more productive, hardier, and more disease-resistant. And those genes can come from some unbelievable sources. For example, in one study described in *Shrinking the Cat*, a scientist isolated a gene that produces a bacteria-fighting protein in the silkworm *Bombyx mori* and then added the gene to the DNA of apple rootstocks. They found that the apples that were later grafted onto those stocks were resistant to a very destructive bacterial disease called fireblight—one that can wipe out entire orchards unless controlled with pesticides.

It remains to be seen whether or not consumers will accept genetically modified apples. But as the popularity of new hybrids like Jazz and SweeTango prove, there's a thriving market for varieties produced by old-fashioned controlled breeding. And there are still so many potential crosses to make so many new varieties on the horizon. We've only just begun to explore the apple.

How to Use This Book

In these pages, I'll take you to some of my favorite orchards and country fairs and cideries—all the places where people celebrate this beautiful, ancient fruit. Then we head back to the kitchen armed with dozens of recipes, from apple-sweet potato soup, to apple skillet pie, to a simple, delicious apple nut cake. I promise you'll eat well.

The recipes come from my imagination, from ideas inspired by chefs, friends, and family, and from my growing collection of old American cookbooks. Some are adaptations of recipes I developed in years past, some were handed down on worn slips of paper from my great-aunt Madeline, a talented cook and young widow who lived with my grandparents in Windsor Locks, Connecticut, and was the designated baker for our weekly Sunday dinners. They cover ground both sweet and savory, designed to complement, say, the vegetal notes of a tart green Pippin apple (see Apple, Cucumber, Lime, and Mint Salsa on [page 274](#)) or the milder Golden Delicious or Jazz varieties that hold up well in pie ([pages 189–202](#)). Apples are so diverse, with such different flavor profiles, it was easy to develop recipes that spanned breakfast to dinner.

To ensure your success with these recipes, I've come up with a simple way to guarantee that you're always using the best apple for any particular dish. Based on my own cooking and research, I've grouped 59 popular varieties into four categories based on how they perform in cooking: **Firm-Tart** apples such as Granny Smith, which work in rich desserts that need some acidity; **Firm-Sweet** such as Golden Delicious, best for more delicate cakes and savory baked dishes; **Tender-Tart** such as McIntosh, best for sauces and for eating fresh; and **Tender-Sweet**, such as Gala, which are generally eaten fresh or used in quick-cooking dishes such as pancakes. Now, instead of looking for a single variety for your pie, you can choose from many compatible ones in the same category. I hope this will encourage you to try new varieties and experiment in your cooking. Each variety of apple brings something new and delicious to the mix: a bit more spice here, extra tartness there.

Recipes begin on [page 78](#) with some soups and starters, such as Bacon-Wrapped Dates with Curried Apple Hash and Sweet Potato, Apple, and Ginger Soup ([page 85](#)). But first, let's take an in-depth look at some wonderful apple varieties and learn about how to use them.

APPLE VARIETIES: A PRIMER



Braeburn

How to Match the Apple to the Recipe

Apple varieties are as individual as people, with their own quirky flavors and textures and strengths and behavioral issues. Some perform best in desserts, others in salads. Some are just meant to be eaten out of hand. You can't tell by simply looking at them, of course, and they don't always come with a label.

I've taken some of the guesswork out of this process by organizing fifty-nine popular and worthwhile varieties into four simple categories, which correspond to their best use in the kitchen. I did this based on my own cooking and research and advice from the growers and experts I've met over the years. Apples can vary tremendously depending on where they're grown, and under what conditions. Too much rain one year can dilute flavor, extra sun can enhance sweetness. As apples age, they tend to break down more when cooked. However, if you buy fresh apples from a reputable grower or grocer, you'll have good results.

Most of the recipes in this book will guide you to a category, rather than a specific variety. The categories are:

Firm-Tart, such as Granny Smith, Rhode Island Greening, Northern Spy, or Roxbury Russet. These apples, which hold their shape when cooked, are best in sweet baked desserts like pies or cakes—anything that benefits from a bit of acidity and bright flavor.

Firm-Sweet, such as Golden Delicious, Braeburn, Ginger Gold, or Pink Lady. These work best in sweet and savory baked dishes that need a firm apple with more sweetness than sourness.

Tender-Tart, such as McIntosh, Cortland, and Macoun. These apples break down easily during cooking, which makes them best for cooked soups and sauces. If you like a tart apple, you'll also enjoy these eaten out of hand.

Tender-Sweet, such as Gala and Fuji. I use some of these in salads, dessert sauces and the occasional quick-cooked dish, but mostly enjoy them right out of hand.

There are just a couple of exceptions to my category system: the Gravenstein Apple-Raspberry Tart on [page 205](#), and the Apple, Cucumber, Lime, and Mint Salsa on [page 274](#)—in those cases, the dishes really do work best with the specified fruits. I'm also specific about which apples are best for baking whole (Jazz, Pink Lady, recipes [pages 228](#) and [229](#)); these varieties hold their rosy hue, though other firm-sweet apples are fine.

In all other cases, you can refer to the Cheat Sheet on [page 30](#) when planning your shopping list. Apples do vary quite a bit, even within categories, and choosing a Bramley's Seedling over a Northern Spy will give you a different flavor. But you can't go wrong with any choice—you might just have more lemony notes with one, or spicy notes with another. Some tart apples have a hint of honey on the finish while others are more strictly tart. But these guidelines will still keep you in the proper range and assure the texture you want.

One last note: You'll notice that Red Delicious doesn't appear in any of the following categories. Over the past 120 years, as growers bred the fruit more for uniform good looks than flavor, the apple lost the succulence that first merited its name. I honestly can't think of a single good use for it. But if it were to fit in a category, it would be Tender-Sweet (or, in my opinion, Mush-Sweet).

Apple Varieties: The Cheat Sheet

FIRM-TART

BEST FOR RICHER
BAKED DESSERTS

Arkansas Black

Ashmead's Kernel

Bramley's Seedling

Calville Blanc d'Hiver

Esopus Spitzenburg

Goldrush*

Granny Smith

Hidden Rose

Idared

Newtown Pippin

Northern Spy

Pink Pearl

Rhode Island Greening

Ribston Pippin

Rome

Roxbury Russet
Sierra Beauty
Stayman Winesap*
Suncrip*

FIRM-SWEET

BEST FOR LIGHTER
BAKED DESSERTS

Baldwin
Black Oxford
Blue Pearmain
Braeburn
Cameo
Ginger Gold*
Golden Delicious*
Golden Russet
Gravenstein
Grimes Golden
Honeycrisp
Jazz
Jonagold
Keepsake
Melrose
Mutsu
Opalescent
Piñata*
Pink Lady
Reine des Reinette
Spigold
SweeTango
Winter Banana
Zabergau Reinette

TENDER-TART

BEST FOR FRESH PREPARATIONS,
SAUCES, AND EATING
OUT OF HAND

Black Twig

Cortland*

Empire*

Jonathan

Lady Apple

Macoun

McIntosh

Westfield Seek-No-Further

TENDER-SWEET

ALSO GOOD FOR FRESH
PREPARATIONS, SAUCES,
AND EATING OUT OF HAND

Ambrosia

Cox's Orange Pippin

Fameuse

Fuji*

Gala*

Hudson's Golden Gem

Pomme Gris

Spencer

* Apple variety that doesn't brown quickly when sliced; a good choice for salads.

59 Great Apple Varieties: An In-Depth Guide



AMBROSIA

CATEGORY: Tender-sweet.

BEST USE: This apple is lovely fresh, in salads, or served with cheese. The flesh keeps its shape reasonably well, but it doesn't have enough acidity to work well in pies or tarts.

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