

THE LOST APPLES OF THE SOUTH

HEIRLOOM APPLES ARE BACK. CELEBRATE THEIR NEW GOLDEN AGE WITH A SWEET BITE FROM THE PAST.



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CARAMEL APPLE CHEESECAKE TART

recipe, page 103

This sassy showstopper features a gingersnap cookie-pecan crust, a luscious filling flavored with apple pie spice, and a crown of cooked apples that takes its gilded sheen from melted apple jelly.

SOUTHERN APPLES: A SECOND ACT

by ROWAN JACOBSEN

O

ne blustery day last fall, I sat on the lawn at Monticello with 78-year-old apple guru Tom Burford and sank my teeth into a 'Grimes Golden' apple. It was as sweet and brandied as a praline; it was like nothing I'd ever tasted from a supermarket. It emphatically made the point Tom—whose family has cultivated orchards in Lynchburg, Virginia, since 1713—had been trying to get me to understand, which is that there is a whole universe of Southern apples out there just waiting to be rediscovered. When I think of Southern fruit, apples don't immediately come to mind, yet apples were

already a big deal in the South when Jefferson planted 18 different varieties in his Monticello "fruitery" in the early 1800s. They were a huge deal a century later, when the South was the undisputed apple capital of the world, and, after a few decades of eating commercial fruit that anyone who loves apples would rather forget, they are again asserting themselves into Southern life.

Not just any apples. Southern apples. Apples are not native to North America, and there were no apples here until the colonists brought apple seeds with them. Most of these seeds came from varieties that were adapted to English or other Northern climates and did not fare well in the Southern heat and humidity. But a small percentage did, and over time they produced hundreds of new apple varieties no one had ever seen before—apples uniquely adapted to the South. It was one of the greatest explosions of agricultural creativity in history, and it transformed the United States.

Until refrigeration became common in the 20th century, the great challenge for Southern farmers was keeping food fresh year-round. Thank goodness for apples. Some varieties ripened in June; some hung on the tree until November and were so hard they'd keep in the root cellar until almost the following June. There were juicy ones to be fermented into cider and cider vinegar (a major preservative back in the day) and nearly juiceless ones that could be dried and kept forever. There were big, tart ones for pies and fine-grained varieties that cooked into a smooth sauce. It would be an exaggeration to say that apples made rural Southern life livable, but it's fair to say they were what made it sweet.

That way of life ended in the 1920s with the rise of massive orchards out West, which were soon filling the nation's grocery stores with an irresistibly scarlet, cotton-fleshed icon: the 'Red Delicious'. It tasted terrible, but it outsold the cosmetically challenged regional varieties, which orchardists gradually stopped growing. By the 1960s, America had forgotten about the diversity of its apples.

Fortunately, that isn't where our story ends. Apple fanatics like Tom Burford kept the old varieties alive, patiently grafting shoots from old trees onto new rootstocks, tracking down centuries-old trees on abandoned farms, waiting for people to become interested again. And now we are. In a world craving novel flavors and textures, especially those that have regional roots, heirloom apples are suddenly cutting-edge. They can give us a literal taste of the Old South, as that 'Grimes Golden' did for me, or they can simply dazzle us with deliciousness—a reminder that our agrarian elders had some tricks up their sleeves that we've forgotten. For his part, Tom Burford has never been in more demand, helping new cider-makers plan their orchards, leading tastings at places like Monticello, and hitting the road to promote his new book, *Apples of North America*. For a boy who grew up surrounded by 120 varieties of apples, only to watch nearly every one of them fall by the wayside, it's a sweet ending to a long story.

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GRILLED PORK
CHOPS WITH APPLE-
BOURBON GLAZE
recipe, page 99

Pork. Apples. Bourbon. You can't go wrong with an autumnal trio so ripe for a smoky kiss on the grill.

FENNEL-APPLE
SLAW
recipe, page 103

Serve this crunchy, fresh salad as a bracing accompaniment to smoky grilled or roasted meat or fish.

APPLE STACK CAKE
recipe, at right

Appalachian tradition holds that guests would bring layers of cake to a wedding, and the bride's family would bring the filling. The taller the cake, the more popular the bride, so the saying goes.



THE RECIPES

We've included supermarket apple varieties in the following recipes for the sake of convenience, but we encourage you to seek out new flavors at your local farmers' market. (See "10 Apples to Try Now," page 102.) Any crisp, sweet apple will work in savory recipes. Use tart, firm apples in desserts.

APPLE STACK CAKE

Use six disposable 8-inch aluminum cake pans to create the layers of this stunning cake. Prepare the filling up to three days before assembling the cake.

FILLING

- 3 lb. tart apples (such as Granny Smith), peeled and cut into 1/2-inch wedges
- 3 lb. crisp apples (such as Braeburn or Honeycrisp), peeled and chopped
- 1 cup firmly packed light brown sugar
- 1/2 lemon, sliced

CAKE

- Vegetable cooking spray
- 6 (8-inch) round disposable aluminum foil cake pans
- Parchment paper
- 1 cup butter, softened
- 2 cups sugar
- 5 large eggs, separated
- 1 1/2 tsp. apple pie spice
- 3 cups all-purpose flour, divided
- 1 cup buttermilk
- 1 tsp. baking soda
- 1 cup chopped toasted pecans
- 1 cup apple butter
- Apple Cider Glaze

1. Prepare Filling: Bring first 4 ingredients to a light boil in a Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Reduce heat to medium-low, and simmer, stirring often, 25 to 30 minutes or until apples are tender and juices thicken. Discard lemon slices. Cool completely (about 2 hours). Cover and chill until ready to use.
2. Prepare Cake: Lightly grease disposable cake pans with cooking spray; line bottoms of pans with parchment paper, and lightly grease parchment paper.
3. Preheat oven to 350°. Beat



butter at medium speed with a heavy-duty electric stand mixer until creamy. Gradually add sugar, beating until light and fluffy. Add egg yolks, 1 at a time, beating just until blended after each addition.

4. Stir together apple pie spice and 2 3/4 cups flour in a medium bowl; stir together buttermilk and baking soda in a small bowl. Add flour mixture to butter mixture alternately with buttermilk mixture, beginning and ending with flour mixture. Beat at low speed just until blended after each addition.

5. Stir together pecans and remaining 1/4 cup flour. Fold pecan mixture and apple butter into batter.

6. Beat egg whites at high speed with an electric mixer until stiff peaks form. Stir about one-third of egg whites into batter; fold in remaining egg whites.

7. Divide cake batter among prepared pans, spreading with an offset spatula.

8. Bake at 350° for 7 minutes; rotate pans from top rack to bottom rack. Bake 7 to 9 more minutes or until a wooden pick inserted in center comes out clean.

9. Remove cake layers from oven, and brush each with 2 to 3 Tbsp. warm Apple Cider Glaze. (Reserve remaining glaze.) Cool cake layers in pans on wire racks 10 minutes. Remove from pans to wire racks; discard parchment paper. Cool completely (about 30 minutes).

10. Assemble Cake: Place 1 layer, glaze-side up, on serving platter. Top with 1 1/2 cups filling. Repeat with remaining layers and filling.

Top last layer with any remaining filling, and drizzle cake with desired amount of reserved Apple Cider Glaze.

MAKES 12 to 14 servings. **HANDS-ON** 1 hour, 15 min.; **TOTAL** 4 hours, 15 min., including glaze

Apple Cider Glaze

Bring 1 cup sugar, 1/2 cup apple cider, 1/2 cup butter, and 1 Tbsp. light corn syrup to a boil in a small heavy saucepan over medium-high heat, stirring constantly. Reduce heat to medium, and cook, stirring constantly, 4 minutes. Remove from heat, and stir in 1 tsp. vanilla extract.

Note: If necessary, microwave glaze in a microwave-safe bowl at HIGH 10 to 20 seconds before drizzling over cake.

MAKES about 3/4 cup. **HANDS-ON** 15 min., **TOTAL** 15 min.

GRILLED PORK CHOPS WITH APPLE-BOURBON GLAZE

The key to success here is to brush the Apple-Bourbon Glaze on the chops during the last few minutes on the grill, turning and brushing often to create a layered, lacquered look. Garnish the chops with grilled halves of small apples brushed with the glaze.

- 2 Tbsp. dark brown sugar
- 1 1/2 tsp. kosher salt
- 1 tsp. freshly ground black pepper
- 1 tsp. garlic powder
- 1/2 tsp. paprika
- 4 (12-oz.) bone-in pork rib chops

2 Tbsp. olive oil
Apple-Bourbon Glaze

1. Stir together first 5 ingredients. Brush pork with olive oil, and rub both sides with sugar mixture. Place pork in a 9- x 13-inch baking dish; cover and chill 12 to 24 hours. Remove pork from refrigerator, and let stand at room temperature 30 minutes.
2. Preheat grill to 350° to 400° (medium-high) heat. Grill chops, covered with grill lid, 6 to 8 minutes on each side or until almost done. Brush chops with glaze; turn and brush other side with glaze. Grill, covered with grill lid, 2 minutes.
3. Repeat process, without grill lid and turning chops every 10 seconds, until glaze thickens and chops are cooked through.

MAKES 4 servings. **HANDS-ON** 25 min.; **TOTAL** 12 hours, 55 min., including glaze

Apple-Bourbon Glaze

- 1 (12-oz.) can frozen apple juice concentrate, thawed
- 1 cup bourbon
- 3 Tbsp. dark brown sugar
- 1 Tbsp. Dijon mustard
- 1/2 tsp. kosher salt
- 1/2 tsp. dried crushed red pepper

Stir together first 5 ingredients in a medium saucepan. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat. Reduce heat to medium, and simmer, stirring occasionally, 13 to 15 minutes or until mixture has thickened and is reduced to about 1 cup. Stir in red pepper. **MAKES** 1 cups. **HANDS-ON** 5 min., **TOTAL** 20 min.

TERRY MANIER



CARROT-APPLE SOUP

recipe, page 103

The sweet notes of carrots and apples play off one another to create a savory melody in this creamy, refreshing soup.

APPLE FLATBREAD

- 1 (11-oz.) can refrigerated thin-crust pizza dough
- Vegetable cooking spray
- 2 crisp, sweet apples (such as Gala, Fuji, or Braeburn)
- 1 1/2 tsp. fresh lemon juice, divided
- 1 cup ricotta cheese
- 1 tsp. firmly packed lemon zest
- 1/2 tsp. kosher salt
- 1/4 tsp. freshly ground black pepper
- 1/2 small red onion, thinly

- sliced
- 1/2 cup slivered almonds, toasted
- 1 tsp. honey
- Garnish: thinly sliced fresh flat-leaf parsley leaves

1. Preheat oven to 425°. Press pizza dough into a 14- x 9-inch rectangle in a lightly greased (with cooking spray) jelly-roll pan.
2. Bake at 425° on lower oven rack 20 minutes or until lightly browned and crisp. Meanwhile, thinly slice apples; toss with

- 1/2 tsp. lemon juice.
 - 3. Stir together ricotta cheese, lemon zest, kosher salt, freshly ground black pepper, and remaining 1 tsp. lemon juice. Spread ricotta mixture over baked crust.
 - 4. Arrange apples over ricotta mixture, and sprinkle with onion slices and almonds. Drizzle with honey. Cut into squares, and serve immediately.
- MAKES** 6 to 8 appetizer servings.
HANDS-ON 15 min.,
TOTAL 30 min.

Chicken-Apple Sausage Flatbread

Prepare recipe through Step 2, omitting ricotta, zest, onion, almonds, and honey. Cook 1 (12-oz.) package smoked chicken-and-apple sausage links in a skillet over medium-high heat 6 minutes or until browned; slice. Stir salt and pepper into 1/2 cup whipped cream cheese spread; spread over baked crust. Top with apples and sausage. Sprinkle with chopped fresh chives and basil.

HANDS-ON 20 min., **TOTAL** 40 min.



APPLE FLATBREAD TWO WAYS

Bake store-bought pizza dough to make a convenient and versatile canvas for apples, cheese, and herbs. Serve as appetizers or the main course.

**ALBEMARLE PIPPIN**

QUEENS, NEW YORK, 1720

This NYC native thrived in the Virginia Piedmont and became a favorite of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. Today, its sprightly lemon-and-pineapple flavor provides the pizzazz in a new wave of Champagne-like ciders.

**YATES**

FAYETTE COUNTY, GEORGIA, 1840s

Little 'Yates' can take heat and humidity, which is why it became a standard on farms throughout the southernmost states. Sweet and tart with a spicy twang, it makes the perfect small snack all winter long.

**GRIMES GOLDEN**

BROOKS COUNTY, WEST VIRGINIA, 1790

Supersweet with high sugar content and blasts of banana and anise flavors, it became the favorite of moonshiners and children alike. The first 'Golden Delicious' tree sprang from a 'Grimes Golden' seed.

**YORK IMPERIAL**

YORK, PENNSYLVANIA, 1820

Comically lopsided with a juicy sweetness and a way of melting into fluffy sauce when cooked, it does best in the states near the Mason-Dixon Line. Find it piled high in Maryland and Virginia markets every Thanksgiving.

**MAIDEN'S BLUSH**

BURLINGTON, NEW JERSEY, 1817

This winsome apple was important to Mid-Atlantic and southern Appalachian farmsteads. Its cheerful pink cheeks made it an easy sell in the market, and its low-juice flesh made it the top choice for dried apples—a 19th-century staple.

**ARKANSAS BLACK**

BENTONVILLE, ARKANSAS, 1870

A stunning 'Winesap' seedling, it was famed for staying power in the root cellar, where its tart and tannic bite mellowed into delightful flavors reminiscent of a glass of iced tea sweetened with orange-blossom honey.

**GOLDEN DELICIOUS**

CLAY COUNTY, WEST VIRGINIA, 1890

The second-most-successful apple of all time after 'Red Delicious'. The supermarket version is bland, but the honeyed aromas of a tree-ripened one from a Southern farm capture the very essence of apple.

**WINESAP**

MOORESTOWN, NEW JERSEY, LATE 1700s

The most important of all Southern apples, it reigned before the advent of controlled atmosphere storage and the rise of 'Red Delicious'. Tart and foxy, it's equally gifted for fresh eating or in pies or cider.

**BEN DAVIS**

BERRY'S LICK, KENTUCKY, CIRCA 1800

It grew prolifically and was so hard and dry that it survived months at sea. The "Mortgage Lifter" saved countless antebellum farms, which sent barges down the Mississippi to New Orleans and on to Europe.

**HEWES CRAB**

VIRGINIA, CIRCA 1700

These little pink-and-yellow ornaments are too sour for eating out of hand, but they make the best-tasting hard cider in the country, if not the world. A mainstay at Monticello, 'Hewes Crab' is now being rediscovered around the South.



10 APPLES TO TRY NOW

FENNEL-APPLE SLAW

This vibrant seasonal salad is an ideal way to showcase your favorite apples—just be sure to use ones that are super crisp, tart, and sweet, and keep the peels on to add color and texture. Can't find fennel? Three ribs of thinly sliced celery make a good substitute in a pinch.

- 1 cup thinly sliced celery
- 1 cup coarsely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
- 1 large shallot, thinly sliced
- 1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil
- 1 tsp. kosher salt
- 1/2 tsp. freshly ground black pepper
- 1 large fennel bulb
- 1 large crisp, sweet apple, thinly sliced
- 2 Tbsp. apple cider vinegar
- 1 tsp. sugar

1. Toss together first 6 ingredients in a medium bowl. Slice fennel bulb thinly, reserving fronds. Finely chop fennel fronds to equal 1 1/2 Tbsp., and sprinkle over salad. Add fennel slices to salad.

2. Toss together apple slices, vinegar, and sugar in a small bowl. Add apple mixture to fennel mixture; toss to combine.

MAKES 4 to 6 servings. **HANDS-ON** 20 min., **TOTAL** 20 min.

CARROT-APPLE SOUP

The smart technique for this simple soup eliminates the need for sautéing the vegetables, which preserves the bright color and flavor of the carrots and results in a brighter, more refreshing soup. To keep it vegetarian, substitute vegetable broth for the chicken broth.

- 1 1/2 lb. carrots, peeled and chopped (about 8 large)
- 3 tart apples (such as Granny Smith) or creamy apples (such as McIntosh), peeled and chopped (about 1 lb.)
- 1 large yellow onion, chopped
- 2 cups cream
- 1 1/2 cups unsalted chicken cooking stock
- 1 1/4 cups apple cider
- 3 fresh thyme sprigs

- 1 tsp. kosher salt
- 1/2 tsp. freshly ground black pepper
- Garnishes:** sour cream, diced apples

1. Bring all ingredients to a boil in a Dutch oven over medium-high heat; reduce heat to low, and simmer, stirring occasionally, 50 to 60 minutes or until carrots are tender. Remove from heat, and cool 15 minutes.

2. Remove thyme sprigs. Process soup, in batches, in a blender or food processor until smooth. (For a thinner soup, stir in more broth, 1 Tbsp. at a time.) Spoon into individual bowls, and serve immediately.

MAKES 7 cups. **HANDS-ON** 30 min.; **TOTAL** 1 hour, 45 min.

CARAMEL APPLE CHEESECAKE TART

It may look like a chore, but this cheesecake tart calls for a relatively straightforward preparation: First, press the crust into the tart pan. Next, mix the cream cheese filling, fill the tart shell, and bake.

Finally, gild the pie with sautéed tart apples, and paint them with melted apple jelly for a jeweled effect.

CRUST

- 1 cup finely ground gingersnap cookie crumbs (about 24 to 28 cookies)
- 1/2 cup finely chopped toasted pecans
- 1/4 cup butter, melted
- 2 Tbsp. light brown sugar
- Vegetable cooking spray

FILLING

- 2 (8-oz.) packages cream cheese, softened
- 3/4 cup firmly packed light brown sugar
- 1 large egg
- 1/4 tsp. apple pie spice

TOPPING

- 3 lb. tart apples (such as Granny Smith), peeled and cut into 1/2-inch-thick wedges
- 1/3 cup firmly packed light brown sugar
- 1 Tbsp. butter
- 2 Tbsp. apple jelly

1. Prepare Crust: Preheat oven to 375°. Stir together gingersnap cookie crumbs and next 3 ingredients in a medium bowl until moist. Press crumb mixture on bottom and up sides of a lightly greased (with cooking spray) 9-inch tart pan with removable bottom.

2. Prepare Filling: Beat cream cheese and next 3 ingredients at medium-low speed with an electric mixer until smooth. Pour cream cheese mixture into prepared crust, spreading with an offset spatula. Place tart pan on a baking sheet.

3. Bake at 375° for 20 to 25 minutes or until center is almost set. Cool completely on a wire rack (about 40 minutes). Chill 8 to 12 hours.

4. Prepare Topping: Stir together apples and 1/3 cup light brown sugar in a large bowl. Melt 1 Tbsp. butter in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add apple mixture to skillet, and cook, stirring often, 16 to 18 minutes or until golden brown. Remove skillet from heat, and cool apples completely (about 30 minutes).

5. Arrange apples on top of chilled cheesecake in a decorative fashion. (To achieve the rosette look pictured on page 95, start by arranging apples in an overlapping circular pattern about 1 inch from the edge of the crust. Make a second small circular pattern inside the first. Thinly slice some of the cooked apples, curl them, and place in the center of the tart.)

6. Microwave jelly and 1 tsp. water in a small microwave-safe bowl at HIGH 20 to 30 seconds or until melted and smooth. Brush apples with half of jelly mixture.

7. Preheat broiler with oven rack 5 to 6 inches from heat. Broil tart 2 to 3 minutes or just until apples begin to brown. Remove from oven, and brush apples with remaining jelly mixture. Chill 1 hour before serving.

Note: Tart will hold in refrigerator overnight, but the crust will soften the longer it sits in the refrigerator.

MAKES 8 servings. **HANDS-ON** 1 hour; **TOTAL** 11 hours, 30 min.

PICK A BETTER APPLE

THE DIVERSITY OF APPLES AT MANY FARMERS' MARKETS AND SUPERMARKETS HASN'T BEEN THIS RICH IN DECADES. HERE'S HOW TO SHOP SMART.

Apple season in the South runs from summer through fall.

Smart farmers at the market slice samples of each apple, from tart to sweet. Ask for a taste to determine your favorite.

Pick up an apple. It should feel heavy for its size and very firm. Also, redness is not a sign of ripeness.

Mix and match a bag of apples so you can try several different varieties.

At home, store apples in their own refrigerator crisper drawer. Eat or cook any with nicks or bruises immediately so they don't spoil the whole bunch.

You'll find the most diverse apple varieties in the cooler climates of the mountain South.

Looking to visit an orchard? See orangeppin.com for a state-by-state guide.

To order Southern apples online, visit randaorchards.com or mercier-orchards.com.

For apple trees, visit centuryfarmorchards.com or bighorsecreekfarm.com.