



APPLE COUNTRY

WE LIVE IN A LEADING AGRICULTURAL STATE THAT'S ALSO A CULINARY MECCA—SO IS IT ANY WONDER THAT THE HV DOMINATES THE APPLE SCENE? HERE'S EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT OUR REGIONAL VARIETIES, EXCELLENT CIDERIES, AND PICK-YOUR-OWN ORCHARDS.

BY JANET SIROTO



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hat is it about our apples that make them so irresistibly delicious? It could be that the Hudson Valley is the birthplace of commercial orcharding. “It started here with Dutch settlers in the early 1600s—they put in a lot of effort over the next 200 years to develop commercial production,”

says Craig Cavallo, co-author of *American Cider* and co-owner of Rhinebeck’s Golden Russet Café and Grocery. “We have a warmer climate than elsewhere in the Northeast, so the fruit ripens faster and can get to market and into the hands of consumers faster.”

That tradition has deepened its roots, as heirloom varieties and new ones offer up bushels of options. The season may well be longer than you think, too. “It starts in late August with Ginger Golds and goes into November with Granny Smiths,” says Holly Brittain, one of the owners of Rose Hill Farm and Ferments in Red Hook. When you hit farmers market this fall or head to an orchard to pick your own peck, try these native varieties:

AUGUST

GINGER GOLD Likely to be the first apple you taste, since they ripen in late summer, Ginger Golds are big, bright yellow, crisp, and sweet. Ideal in salads or served sliced.

MCINTOSH Juicy, tangy, tender: The McIntosh is a favorite for good reason. Discovered by John McIntosh in 1811, they are typically red on one side and green on the other. Use any which way!

PAULA RED If there were a popularity contest for apples, the Paula Red might win. It was found in Michigan in the late 1900s, where the farmer responsible named it after his wife. Pro tip: this tart, juicy variety sells out quickly.

SEPTEMBER

CORTLAND This cross between McIntosh and Ben Davis apples debuted in

1898, and was named after its birthplace, Cortland County. Semi-sweet, juicy, and delicious, this multitasker is great cooked up in applesauce and apple pies, as a salad ingredient—or simply sliced.

CRIMSON CRISP This exceptional apple, described as having hints of melon, orange, and spice, is the brainchild of the Perdue, Rutgers, and the University of Illinois cooperative plant breeding program. It’s a delightful snack.

EMPIRE Named after its home state, the Empire was created by Cornell University in 1966, and it marries the sweetness of a Red Delicious with the tang of a McIntosh. Great for any use you can think of.

ESOPUS SPITZENBURG These date back to pre-Revolutionary times and were supposedly Thomas



Jefferson’s favorite. Fishkill Farms says some of their trees came from Jefferson’s Monticello estate! This crisp, sweet-tart apple can be eaten out of hand, or if you’re game to try making cider, this one’s perfect.

GALA Red-gold beauties, developed in New Zealand, that are a favorite with kids. **GOLDEN DELICIOUS** This yellow-skinned apple is actually not the first cousin of the Red Delicious. It’s a honey-sweet fruit that’s great for making apple sauce or enjoyed on its own.

HONEYCRISP Available in early September, Honeycrisp apples were produced from

a crossbreeding program of Macoun and Honeygold apples in the 1960s to develop winter hardy cultivars with high fruit quality. Honeycrisps tend to be sweet-tart and juicy.

IDA RED This firm, tart apple is prized for everything from charcuterie boards to baking into breads and pies. What’s in a name? It was developed in Idaho, and you can guess what color it is.

JONATHAN An oldie but goodie: The thin-skinned, sweet-tart, crisp Jonathan is a classic American heirloom apple. Legend has it that it was discovered in the early 1800s by one Jonathan Zander. (When you have a Jonagold or Jonamac, you know that a Jonathan is somewhere in

its lineage.) Good for snacks and cooking.

RED DELICIOUS A seedling discovered in Iowa in 1875 led to the classic Red Delicious, which sadly has lost some of its charm in commercial production. See how good a snack this can be when you pick one fresh.

SHIZUKA Look out, Honeycrisps: Shizukas are giving you some

competition. These big, golden apples, which hail from Japan, enjoy universal love for their sweet taste. **STAYMAN WINESAPS** An heirloom variety that apple cognoscenti adore, the Stayman Winesap originated in Kansas in 1866. As the name hints, they have an almost wine-like flavor and dense, juicy flesh. Try them sliced on a cheeseboard. **SWEETANGO** Another bit of agricultural magic, the Sweetango descends from the Honeycrisp and inherited the “little bit sweet, little bit tart” genes and super-crisp texture.

OCTOBER

BALDWIN Considering its vibrant red and green coloring and tart flavor, it’s no wonder the Baldwin was one of the most popular apples from 1850 until WWI. Today, it’s beloved for baking and eating fresh—and how well it keeps.

BRAEBURN The Braeburn is no New York local—it was first cultivated at Braeburn Orchard in New Zealand in the 1950s. With its generous size, red- and yellow-streaked skin, tangy taste, and flesh that doesn’t release too much moisture when baked, Braeburns are prized for baking.

EVERCRISP Another creation of agricultural research, the Evercrisp is a bit of an “ugly duckling apple,” says Tenley Fitzgerald, VP of Marketing at Yes! Apples, which partners with 50+ New York apple-growers to promote and sell their fruit. “Get past the way it looks and it eats so well!”

FUJI Sweet, hard, and crisp, Fujis are a Japanese apple with roots in the U.S.,

dating back to the mid-1900s. Perfect as a snack. **GOLDEN RUSSET** Firm flesh with a tart (some say pineapple-y) taste, this Russet—meaning rough-skinned versus smooth red perfection—causes some shun it, but it’s delicious for out of hand eating, and it’s a cider-making staple. **NORTHERN SPY** This jumbo apple dates to the early 1800s and was named after a character in the dime-store novel *The Northern Spy*. Tart and firm, with a slightly pear-like flavor, heed the saying, “When baking a pie, use a spy.”

ROME Found in Rome (Ohio, not Italy) in 1816, these tart apples hold their shape and tang well, making them A+ for sautéing and serving with porkchops or tucking them into a grilled cheese.

NOVEMBER

GRANNY SMITH You may think of this Jolly Rancher-green fruit as being crazy-tart, but “the acidity mellows when fully tree-ripened to create a balanced flavor,” says Brittain. This crisp apple is ideal for cooking and eating on its own.

PINK LADY Originating about 50 years ago in Australia, this gorgeously round and vibrant red-pink apple is sweet, tart, and refreshing—use it any which way you like.



THE CIDER CIRCUIT

It’s not your imagination: The Hudson Valley is the premier hard cider hotspot in the country, with amazing, fermented options at every turn. “There’s such growth, progress, and education happening here, year after year,” says Cavallo. “From the cider drinkers to the makers to the people working in the orchards, it’s a cultural endeavor that just keeps getting better. Everyone learns from one another.” Taste the craft and creativity for yourself at these killer cideries:

Abandoned Cider

Woodstock \ abandonedcider.com

A couple of years ago, two hobby cider makers, Eric Childs and Martin Bernstein, set to work reclaiming abandoned orchards and crowdsourcing apples from backyards across the Catskills. Up and running as a commercial enterprise since 2017, Abandoned Cider still uses detective skills to sniff out the best heirloom apples in the area to craft their bone-dry ciders, many of which are small-batch. Visit one of Abandoned Cider’s three outposts—in Woodstock, Red Hook, and Kingston—to learn about their craft (and perhaps study a map that shows precisely where their apples came from).

SEASON’S SIP For the beer-lover who’s new to cider, Hopped is the perfect, crushable introduction.

Angry Orchard

Walden \ angryorchard.com

The 60-acre Angry Orchard is a local spot gone big-time: They often capture half of the national cider market. If you’re lucky enough to be in the Hudson Valley, check out their home base: Visit the taproom and try their renowned ciders—Crisp Apple, Pear, Rosé, Green Apple, and unfiltered—plus whatever else may be brewing. The kitchen serves up shareable appetizers, and food trucks drive by on weekends. Booked a guided orchard walk or a treehouse experience, which will give you amazing vistas of the orchard and the Gunks. Devotees may join the cider club for discounts.

SEASON’S SIP You can’t go wrong with their Crisp Apple classic but see if Pommeau is available—it’s a traditional French beverage blending fresh-pressed apple juice and apple brandy with notes of vanilla and almond.

Bad Seed Hard Cider

Highland \ badseedhardcider.com

Apples grew for six generations at Wilklow Farms, but it wasn't until a decade ago that Albert Wilklow and his friend Devin Britton began melding old and new techniques to create cider with zero grams of sugar. There are a few dozen taps (cider plus local beer) spread over two locations: The Taproom (at the cidery) and the Farm Bar (at the orchard). You'll discover about 30 small-batch options per season, says Britton, like Plum Rose (blue plums are added for a tart blush cider); Pink Lady, a single varietal; and Old Elmer, a dry cider aged with American oak. Brick-fired pizza and poutine are on the menu, plus food trucks visit regularly. Bad Seed's Fall Back Festival will be on November 5-6.

SEASON'S SIP Their flagship Dry Hard Cider. Fermented with a Sauvignon Blanc yeast, it's akin to apple champagne.

Hardscrabble Cider

North Salem \

hardscrabbleny.com

Sure, the rotating ranks of food trucks and live music nights are a big draw at Hardscrabble, but there's no getting around the irresistible allure of their cider. Owned by the Covino brothers (Alex, Kevin, and Ben), the micro farm-cidery is renowned for its classic as well as its inventive drinks. Black Dirt has earthy beet notes, Jalapeño Cucumber suits those who like something spicy, and their Dry Cider is an all-around pleaser with Macintosh notes. Located at Harvest Moon Orchard & Farm, Hardscrabble is tucked inside the farm store. Grab your drink and head outside to the tables overlooking the pumpkin patch, a pond, and perhaps some frolicking chickens.

SEASON'S SIP You can't go wrong with their straight-up ciders, but if you're there on a weekend and feeling daring, try an Orchard Bloody—described as “basically a salad,” it mixes Hardscrabble's dry hard cider, local vodka, and veggies.

Left Bank Ciders

Catskill \ leftbankciders.com

Left Bank Ciders has quite the badass backstory: It began when two out of three co-owners gathered castoff apples, foraged some more, and then used a food processor and pillowcases to grind and squeeze out and ultimately ferment their cider. Today, Left Bank still uses apples from abandoned orchards, donated fruit, and pounds upon pounds of apples from growers within 100 miles of their Catskill home base. They describe their ciders as “dry and complex,” and you can taste a rotating selection at their tap room, accompanied by pizza thanks to a new partnership with Be Golden Farms in Berne.

SEASON'S SIP Bell Hill, a hyperlocal star. “It's made exclusively from foraged wild apples from Greene County and created with native yeast, so the whole process is just what we're getting from nature,” says co-owner Tim Graham.



Hardscrabble Cider, below. Seminary Hill, right. Angry Orchard, far right.



Little Apple Cidery

Hillsdale / little-apple-cider.business.site

Tucked off a winding road in Hillsdale, Little Apple Cidery has an expansive lawn where you can sit and contemplate the clouds. But it isn't just a beautiful location—the orchard is certified organic, and the ciders are spectacular. In fact, Floraison, a seasonal, naturally carbonated sparkling cider, recently won gold at Great Lakes International Cider and Perry Competition, the largest in the world. Stop by to sip some of owner and cidemaker Ron Bixby's creations, and why not have a cheese plate as well? Mark your calendars for Ciderfest on October 9. It's a free event with music, a barrel-rolling contest, and Aloha Tacos food truck—oh, and plenty of cider.

SEASON'S SIP Little Apple is one of the very few locations where you can find quince cider—see if you can snag some.

Nine Pin Cider Works

Albany \ ninepincider.com

If you're looking for a different vibe than a pastoral paradise—something a little more downtown—check out Nine Pin. It's a Granny Smith-green building sporting a mural of an orchard in the Broadway warehouse district. There are straightforward apple-centric ciders, plus inventive ones like Pear Pear and Adirondack Maple. For more fun: join the 26er challenge and try all of the limited draft cider released over the course of a year (you'll be rewarded with swag, discounts, and a special party). What goes great with Nine Pin's ciders? Their sourdough pizzas, Bavarian pretzels, and house-made pickles.

SEASON'S SIP Ginger cider, made with Samascott Orchards' dessert apples. It's infused with ginger and orange peel and tells your tastebuds that fall is truly here.

Orchard Hill Cider Mill

New Hampton \ orchardhillcidermill.com

This compact, absolute charmer of a taproom is set inside a white-trimmed, barn-red building at Soons Orchards. They make two styles of Pommeau: the Ten66 (named for year the Normans invaded England) and the richer, barrel-aged Ten66 Reserve. Reservations are recommended for the cozy, wood-



paneled space which offers six ciders. Drink up and dive into a charcuterie board or cider-donut bread pudding. If you fall in love with their ciders and Pommeau, join Orchard Hill's cider club.

SEASON'S SIP Say cheers to Bitters and Sharps. “We use a naturally carbonated methodology in champagne bottles to create a very rich, fruity cider with zero grams of residual sugar,” says co-owner Karl duHoffmann.

Rockland Cider Works

Orangeburg \

rocklandciderworks.com

You've been to beer gardens, but what about a cider garden? Head to the county's very first cidery at Van Houten Farms. Grab a glass of something crisp and refreshing at the Tollhouse Taproom and then take a seat in the garden center that's awash in seasonal displays. You'll have your choice of Rockland's sugar- and gluten-free hard ciders made with 100 percent NYS apples. The flagship Dry Run is impressive on its own, but there's usually a surprise on tap, too, from Ida Red to Pumpkin to Butterscotch. Live music and food trucks give you more reason to linger as afternoon turns into evening. They have a second location farther north in Gilboa.

SEASON'S SIP Try Bounceberries, a dry, tart, but smooth cranberry cider that is full of fall flavor.

Seminary Hill Orchard & Ciderys

Callicoon \ seminaryhill.co

If you love apples, architecture, and all things eco-friendly,

Seminary Hill will delight you. The 12-acre orchard, with 60 varieties of apple and pear trees, uses holistic, pesticide- and herbicide-free methods. The sustainability ethos continues in the stunning, stone-and-timber production facility and tasting room, which is the first cidery to meet passive-house standards. Overlooking the Delaware River, Seminary Hill is so gorgeous, you may not want to leave. Of course, the main event is the quintet of ciders produced: Baldwin Pippin, Beechwoods, Delaware Dry, Northern Spy, and Susan's Semi-Dry, all with little-to-no residual sugar. Turn up on Sundays at 1 p.m. for a tour and tasting; you can also dine on chef Jack Tippet's seasonal menu that pairs well with the cider.

SEASON'S SIP Susan's Semi-Dry 2020. It has the apple flavor and a touch of sweetness that many cider drinkers crave, along with peach and rose notes and a nicely astringent finish.

Treasury Cider

Hopewell Junction \ treasurycider.com

The venerable Fishkill Farms orchard provides the apples that are the stars of the show at Treasury Cider, billed as “tree to bottle Hudson Valley hard cider.” You can have a glass or flight on the porch, overlooking the orchard, with the Catskills soaring in the distance (reservations recommended). Varieties might include Counterpane, a delightful dry cider co-fermented with sweet and tart cherries; Colony, a mead-style cider; and Wild at Heart, a semi-dry cider that is steeped with wild foraged sumac. Another good reason to stop by: The calendar of events, including live music, “Sip and Stretch” yoga, and open mic night.

SEASON'S SIP Pucker up with the Centennial cider—unfiltered, tart, and dry. Want something a little milder? You can't miss with Homestead, a semi-dry with McIntosh, Ida Red, Golden Delicious, Jonamac, and more in the mix.

CROWD-SOURCED CIDER

Golden Russet Café and Grocery is a local favorite among Rhinebeck residents. But what most don't know is the Golden Russet is home to quite an assortment of ciders, thanks to owner Craig Cavallo's love for the hard drink. Beyond their stock, Cavallo and his wife Jenny are embarking on their fourth year of partnering with Rose Hill Farm for a crowd-sourced cider that was solely made to benefit the community.

How it works: There's a rich history of growing fruit in the Hudson Valley, and many folks' properties have too much fruit to use. “We invite people to bring us fruit throughout September. There's a big bin on our property,” explains Cavallo, “and we also pick from some properties.” Rose Hill then crushes, presses, ferments, bottles, and labels the cider. The Golden Russet sells it and donates half of the proceeds to a good cause.

The first year's yield resulted in 12 cases of Clinton Community Harvest Cider; 2021 saw that number surge to 50. Last year's donation went to the Clinton Community Library. “We wanted to give back to the people in this wonderful community that keeps our business alive, so we chose the library down the road,” says Cavallo. To donate apples or taste the fruits of this effort, follow the Golden Russet at @goldenrussetcafe.



PHOTOS BY: HARDCRABBLE CIDER; DANIEL SCHWARTZ

PHOTOS COURTESY OF RESPECTIVE BUSINESSES



Mead Orchards

PICK YOUR PECK

One of fall's favorite pastimes is heading to an orchard and plucking apples straight off the tree. "It's such a great ritual," says Andrew Richards, farm manager and head distiller at Millbrook's Shady Knoll Orchards and Distillery. "Fall in the Hudson Valley is so beautiful, the smell of an orchard is so good." Here are tk to check out:

Barton Orchards

Poughquag \ bartonorchards.com
Incredibly delicious apples + every possible kind of entertainment = Barton Orchards. This 175-acre orchard offers something for everyone: Trees dripping with fruit (from HoneyCrisp to McIntosh), hayrides, kids' petting zoo and fun park; Bark Park for pups, live music, and all kinds of food, from fried pickles to still-warm cider donuts. Arrive early if you don't like lines. And take note of the special weekend events, too: Oktoberfest on September

17-18 and the Fall Festival on September 24-25.



Fishkill Farms

Hopewell Junction \ fishkillfarms.com
This is the spot for eco-certified and organic apples—100+ varieties—including heirlooms (Cox's Orange Pippin and Cortland). Family owned for over a century, Fishkill Farms' PYO season stretches from late August into November. Reserve your spot online to pick your own, and check out which vegetables are ripe, too. Then allow time

to hop on a hayride and take in the view of the Catskills and join in any of the farm's special weekend events, from festivals to yoga.



Greig Farm

Red Hook \ greigfarm.com
Celebrating 80 years, this family-run farm offers 11 varieties of apples, including Jonamac, Gala, and Blondee (kids go crazy for them). Watching and feeding the playful goats behind the farm market is popular; so is grabbing a cider at the Abandoned Cider outpost. Check the schedule for the Sohu craft market, explore the hiking trails with Catskill views, and swing by the pumpkin patch if your home needs some Halloween spirit.



Maskers Orchard

Warwick \ maskers.com
Ten-thousand trees dot

Maskers, with 14 types of apples to tempt you. You'll find a great mix of red and golden varieties; familiar names and some off-the-beaten-path ones, like McCowan, Smoothies, and Surprise. Cars can drive right up to the trees, which is a blessing (convenient) and a curse (dust clouds). The vibe is ultra-welcoming: "Admission is free, parking is free, bags are provided free, and best of all, eat all the apples you wish while visiting our orchard—free!" says the website. There are kiddie rides, donuts, and more to help make a day out of your outing.



Mead Orchards

Tivoli \ meadorchards.com
Here's a little history: Back in 1916, G. Gordon Mead purchased a 100-acre farm and began shipping barrels full of apples down the Hudson River. His grandson Chuck now steers the farm, and rather than floating the apples downstream, the produce is available at local markets and to those PYO-ers who visit. Here you'll find some next-level eco apples: Querina, Rubyfrost, Suncrisp, and other hard-to-find varieties—but all delicious. Head to the highest hills; you'll be rewarded with spectacular views.



KEY

- FOOD
- MAZE
- EVENTS
- TAPROOM
- RIDES
- LIVE MUSIC
- FARM STORE
- BEER PUB AND GARDEN
- PETTING ZOO
- CIDER
- WINE
- HAYRIDES

PHOTOS COURTESY OF RESPECTIVE FARMS

Pennings Orchard

Warwick \ penningsorchard.com
A visit to this sprawling orchard is like a day at the fair. First, pick whichever of the 15 different kinds of apples are ripe (cash only for PYO). Consider yourself warned that the Honeycrisps typically sell out by mid-September. Once you've loaded up on apples, take your time wandering through the vast farm market and garden center, grabbing a bite at the Farm Grill, hanging out at the beer garden, and visiting the animal barn. Check the schedule for events, like live music and goat yoga.



Rose Hill Farm

Red Hook \ pickrosehillfarm.com
A favorite site for families and those seeking the



Fishkill Farms



Rose Hill Farm

perfect Instagram feed, Rose Hill is nestled in the glorious rolling hills of Dutchess. Established in 1798, this family-owned farm has been doing things right for almost 225 years. The PYO season kicks off with Ginger Golds in late August and closes out with Granny Smiths in mid-November. Beyond the rows of apple trees, there's much more to keep you occupied, like live music, food trucks, and Rose Hill's wine and cider served in their soaring-ceilinged taproom, plus pop-up markets and events.



Samascott Orchards

Kinderhook \ samascott.com
If you're the curious type, Samascott Orchards will probably have enough apples—70 varieties—to keep you intrigued all season long. You'll find elusive varieties, such as the Esopus Spitzenburg and Candy Crisp, as you explore this 200-acre orchard. Rent

one of Samascott's four-person surrey bikes (first come, first served) to cover more ground. There's fresh cider, plus homemade cider donuts and ice cream at the farm store. The nearby Samascott Garden Market typically has an original, artistic themed corn maze in the fall; past designs include everything from ice cream cones to spiderwebs.



Stone Ridge Orchard

Stone Ridge \ stoneridgeorchard.com
Head to the heart of the Rondout Valley—between the Gunks and the Catskills—to find this 200-year-old farm. Some of the ancient, original trees still exist on a hilltop, but now there are over 1,000 gourmet apple trees bursting with fruit. If that isn't enough to keep you busy, explore the beautiful land, sample some cider and wood-fired pizza, and see if any live music is on the schedule. Ready to make a weekend out of it? Reserve an on-premises campsite.



Wilkens Farm

Yorktown \ wilkensfarm.com
This Westchester farm, over 100 years old, draws hungry hordes from across the tri-state area. It's so popular, in fact, they encourage visitors to come in September for the best variety of apples—Gala, McIntosh, Baldwin, Cortland, Macoun, and more. (Tip: Rent a pole to help you whack fruit off the upper branches.) But don't stop with just a bushel and a peck; hit up the charming farm market which is a carb-craver's dream come true. Don't even think about leaving without Wilkens' famous apple-cider donuts, strudel sticks, brownies, and possibly a pie.

