

HOW ABOUT THEM APPLES?

October 5, 2021

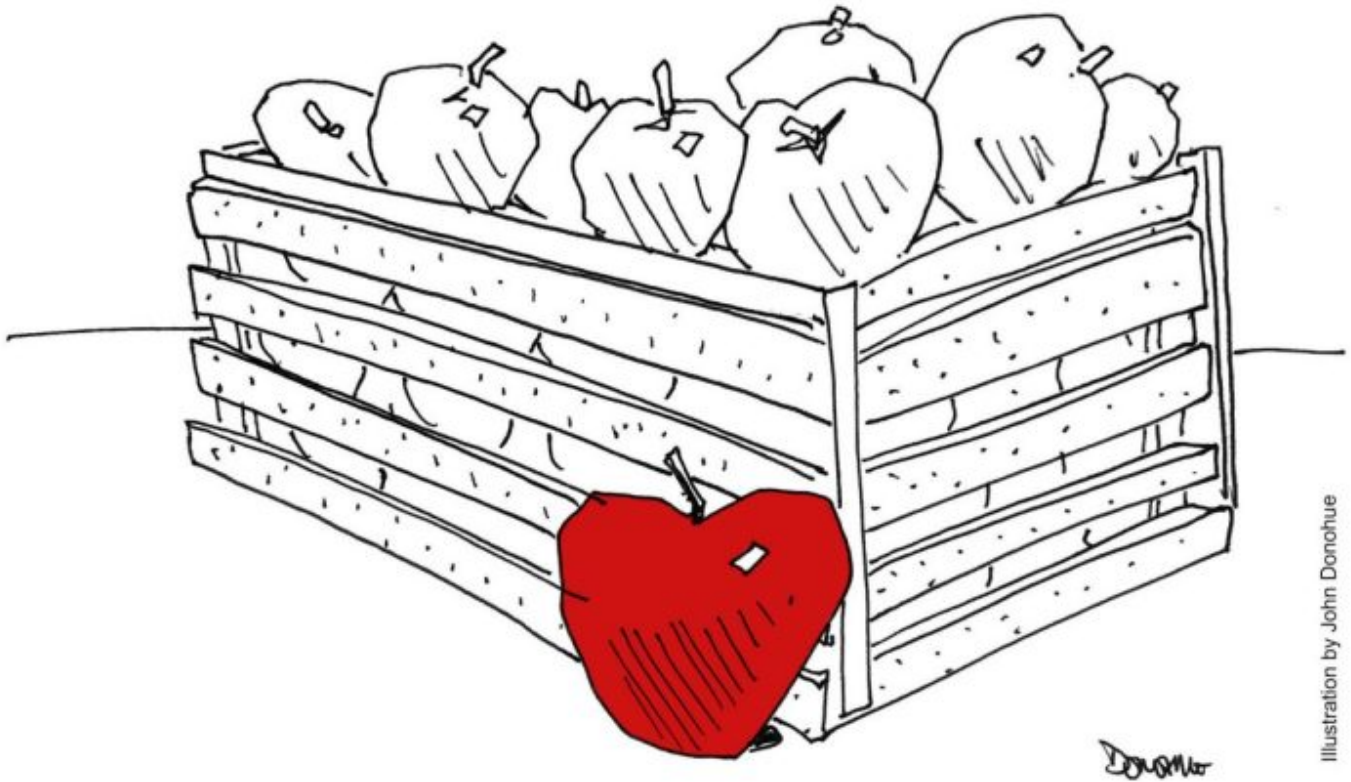


Illustration by John Donohue

By Marisa Bowe

The Coop is bursting with delectable autumn apples. Get ready to nerd out on an encyclopedic survey, from centuries-old heirlooms to present-day, patented and trademarked blockbusters.



Matisse Neal filling up the Coop's numerous apple bins

BEARS HELPED MAKE APPLES SWEET

The domestic apple is native to Kazakhstan, where the primary ancestor of most cultivated apples still grows wild. It was too sour for humans to eat. Bears are thought to be responsible for selecting (and spreading) the biggest, sweetest fruit. This resulted

in apples that humans liked, which were probably domesticated as early as the Neolithic Agricultural Revolution.

An “heirloom” is an apple that was cultivated before WWII and the start of large-scale commercial farming. The Coop gets some of its most appealing heirlooms from Scott Farm in Vermont. Simon Renault, the farm’s general manager, points out that without human intervention, we wouldn’t have any of this variety. “An apple will never reproduce true to seed,” he explains. “They need to get pollinated by a different tree. So the apple will never give you the exact same variety. Grafting a variety you like onto rootstock—that’s the only way you can reproduce [it].”

APPLE HISTORY 101

“That’s the fascinating part about heirlooms,” he continues. “The apples we have today pleased somebody, somewhere, way back in the history of humanity. One day there’s a guy who walked by a hedgerow, grabbed an apple, took a bite and was like, ‘Oh my God, this tastes like pear. I bet you this would make a great sauce.’”

Just as Renault describes, the Gravenstein apple tree was discovered in 1669 in Denmark. Or was it Italy? Or Germany? Wherever it was and whoever discovered it, they knew what they were doing. The Gravenstein is renowned for its creamy, juicy flesh and distinctive, well-balanced sweet and tart flavors with a touch of tang.

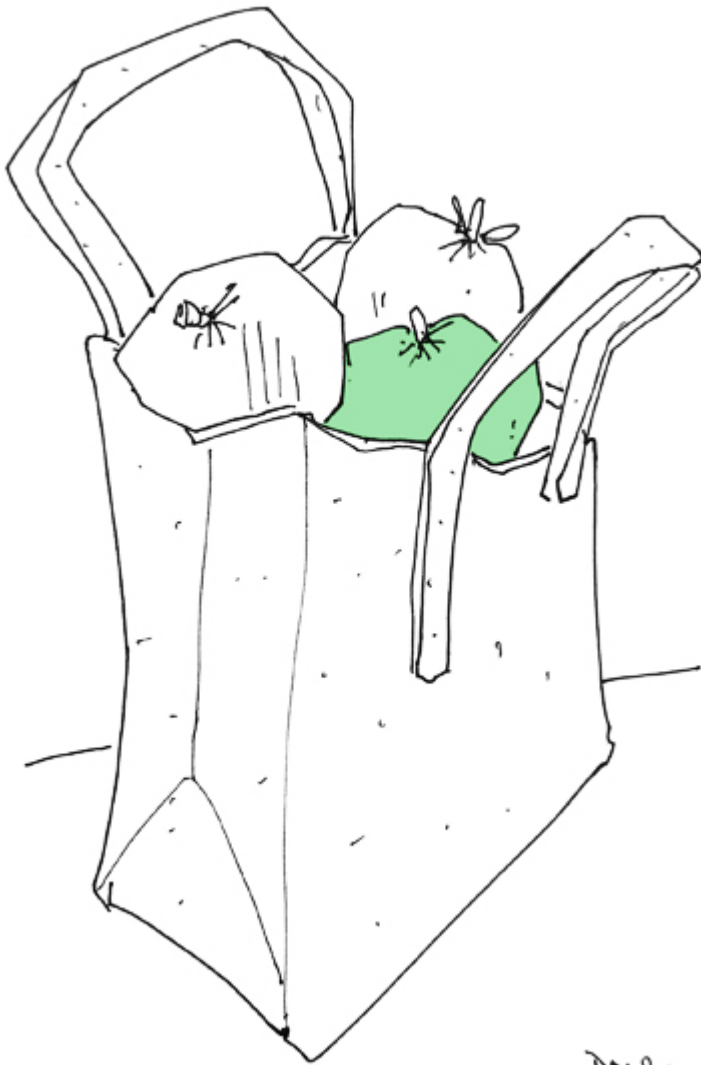


Illustration credit: John Donohue

Donohue

MORE APPLE "SPECIES"

The Reine de Reinettes, known as a dessert apple, also has a convoluted history. It became known in France, Holland and England around 1770 and was called something different in each place. It tastes as good by any of its names, with juicy, subtly crunchy flesh and rich, complex flavor with lush notes of citrus and tropical fruit.

The Lamb Abbey Pearmain apple is named after the place where Mary Malcomb discovered it in 1804, growing on a tree in her backyard garden in Kent, southeast of London. She was awarded a medal for it in 1819 by the Horticultural Society of London. Its firm flesh is intensely flavored with a good sweet/tart balance and pineapple notes.

John McIntosh bought a farm in Ontario in 1811 and discovered apple saplings with especially good fruit. He transplanted them to his garden, and only one survived—to become the parent of every soft, juicy, sweet/tart/spicy McIntosh you've eaten.

Maria Ann "Granny" Smith discovered the apple that bears her name. A midwife and orchardist, the British-born Australian transplant decided to cultivate an apple tree she'd noticed by a creek on her farm in 1868. She gained posthumous fame when it began to become widely grown at the end of the century.

The Golden Supreme was discovered in 1890 in West Virginia—or was it Idaho in 1960? Its soft but crisp flesh is mellow and sweet with a lighter, less complex echo of the Golden Delicious's honey and pear notes.

Cortlands were developed at Cornell University in 1899. Sweet and juicy with a hint of tartness, they're great for fruit salads because they're slow to brown.

Fujis aren't named for the mountain in Japan, but Fujisaki, the town where they were developed in the 1930s. The crisp, firm, juicy flesh has one of the highest sugar contents of any popular apple, and their taste confirms that. Their flavor brings to mind fresh-pressed apple juice.

The Gala was developed the same decade, in New Zealand. Its crisp, soft, juicy flesh is mild and very sweet.

The beautiful Pink Pearl was developed in 1944 in California. Crisp and juicy, it has stunning rosy-pink, tart-sweet flesh.

The Empire was half-discovered, half-bred at Cornell in 1945. It's firm, crisp and juicy, with a tart flavor, and doesn't bruise easily.

The Ginger Gold was discovered among the surviving trees of a Virginia orchard after Hurricane Camille in 1969. It has crisp, fine-textured flesh that's sweet with mildly

tart overtones, and is slow to brown.

Sweet Sixteens were developed over 31 years at the University of Minnesota, making its debut in 1978. Its crisp yellow flesh is very sweet, with a distinctive, complex, rich flavor that's sweet and spicy with vanilla, cherry, anise, bourbon and nutty notes.

The Honeycrisp was developed at the University of Minnesota over 31 years and released in 1991. The blockbuster fruit earned the university ten million bucks before its patent expired. With a juicy, snappy-crisp—but not hard—texture and a syrupy, slightly tart sweetness, it “changed the whole game,” said Fred Wilklow, the owner of Wilklow Orchards, another Coop supplier.

The Zestar!® (yes, the annoying exclamation is part of its trademarked name) was released in 1999 by the University of Minnesota. Crisp and light, its unique flavor is sweet and tangy with brown sugar notes.

SweeTango®, another patented University of Minnesota apple, has its own website. Released in 2006, its crunchy, juicy flesh is sweet and tart, with notes of citrus, honey, spice and maybe some brown sugar.

Sweeties, developed in New Zealand, were introduced in 2012. The firm, crisp, juicy and somewhat coarse pale yellow flesh is mild, very sweet and subtly spicy.