THE ONTARIO TRILLIUM FOUNDATION
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Foodlink Waterloo Region

Fresh in focus
Apples

Local Harvest

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Features

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FOODLINK

218 Dawson St.
Waterloo On
N2L 1S4
(519) 747-7641

Website:
www.foodlink.ca

Local Harvest
Content, layout and editing:

Carmen Everest-Wahl
Nina Bailey-Dick
Peter Katona

Local Farm Profile: Maple-Crisp Orchard

How many farms can boast that they smell good? When you walk into the Horst's farm store, the smell of fresh sweet apples greets you –even in February! You may have been resigned to eating sub-par apples over the winter, but at this farm west of Elmira you can still find a wide variety of perfectly ripened, crisp apples just waiting to sink your teeth into!

The secret to Maple-Crisp Orchard's great selection and long season is a combination of picking apples when they're perfectly ripe and a huge cooler that stores the apples at 2°Celsius. Norman and Bernadine Horst bought the 110 acre farm with its 8 acre apple orchard 5 years ago. Although their farm-gate sign still reads Martin's Apples after the previous owners the Horst's are giving the property a new name—Maple-Crisp Orchard. Is Maple-Crisp a new variety of apple? No, not yet at least. It is a name that highlights the fact that this same farm is known for its 18 acre sugar bush. Busloads of people celebrating the Elmira Maple Syrup Festival arrive at the Horst farm to watch the sap boiling in the sugar shack and enjoy the fresh baked goods and hot chocolate while stocking up on maple syrup.

Norman and Bernadine Horst
Maple-Crisp Orchard, Elmira

Maple-Crisp Orchard is truly a mixed-farm producing beef, veal, hogs, maple syrup, apples, apple butter, and apple cider. In their well-stocked farm store you'll also find other local food like potatoes and honey that make a stop well worthwhile. If you are the kind of person who enjoys a really good apple, you should talk to Norman. He can introduce you to varieties you'll never find in the supermarket such as their most popular Macoun variety at $11/bushel (a cross from McIntosh but sweeter and juicier). As you sample the different varieties Norman can tell you the best kinds for fresh eating, baking, storing – he even offers returns on apples if someone bought a variety that they (or their spouse) did not like! With over 25 varieties, including a heritage Blenheim Orange Pippin, you're sure to find an apple to suit everyone's taste. In addition to more common varieties, Maple-Crisp Orchard produces: Macoun, Fiesta, Spartan, Royal Gala, Honey-Crisp, Snows, Jona-Gold, Talmon Sweet, Russet, Northern Spy, Vista Bella, Yellow Harvest, Jersey Mac, Jona-Mac, Melba Paula Red, St. Lawrence, and Ginger Gold.

Apples take a lot of work to harvest, but not many people realize that the pruning for an 8 acre orchard is required from February until August. With their three children too young to help out, the Horsts employ young friends and neighbours to help them harvest in the months of September and October but Norman and the previous owner do all the pruning themselves. To make the orchard more manageable, the Horsts have cut down almost all of the old standard trees and replaced them

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Farm Profile Cont…

with dwarf varieties. When you drive past the Maple-Crisp Orchard you may notice how short the apple trees appear. These dwarf varieties offer easier pruning and harvesting for a larger yield. Though small, they can still produce 5 bushels of apples each – 8 bushels on a good year!

This past year's harvest was an example of the huge yield that is possible when an orchard is healthy and the season is just right. Norman reports that the wet spring and warm September "did wonders" to the apple crop and gave them 50% more than they have ever harvested before! Where do they sell all these apples? They sell mostly from their farm store but also at the newly opened Elmira Farmers' Market, the Elmira Produce Auction Cooperative, and at Selby's – a grocery store in Elmira. While they do sell wholesale, the Horsts prefer to sell from their farm store where they can get a better price for their apples—although their prices are still almost 50% less than what you might pay at the grocery store.

Norman knows the power of advertising and has made sure to have the farm listed on the Buy Local! Buy Fresh! Map each year. Even though he is not always sure that someone has found his farm store through the map, exposure to customers is key. According to Norman, the word quickly gets out. "Even if the map brings two customers, then those two people will tell at least two of their friends and that will have made the map listing worthwhile."

Maple-Crisp is a welcoming farm where Norman says with a smile: "We let people go anywhere on the farm they want." You are welcome to walk in the orchard, pick a few apples, see the animals, or drive back to the sugar shack for a peek at the boiling. Norman offers tours and wagon rides to the sugar shack for groups of 20-30 for just a few dollars each. So if you want to combine some farm fun with stocking up on local apples, maple syrup, apple butter, cider, potatoes, and honey, phone the Horsts to arrange a tour or just stop in on your own. The farm store sells apples until the end of May but the selection is best if you get there in February or before.

With 25 apple varieties to choose from, the farm store at Maple-Crisp Orchard is well worth a visit!

Finding Local Apples

Whatever the season, if you're in the mood for Waterloo Region's best apples, why not consult Foodlink's Buy Local! Buy Fresh! Map. There are numerous farms close by that feature apples and local orchard products like ***apple butter***, ***jams*** and ***cider***. Not all will still have fresh apples in stock so it's usually a good idea to call ahead.

Amos Bauman Map Listing **# 7**
2560 Floradale Rd., Elmira Tel. 669-3102

Corn & More Map Listing **# 18**
2050 Bleams Rd., St. Petersburg Tel. 634-8903

Faul Farms Map Listing **# 28**
1180 Wrigley Rd., Ayr Tel. 632-9450

Hergott Cider Mill & Products Map Listing **# 35**
928 Erb St. West, Waterloo Tel. 885-2306

Norman and Bernadine Horst Map Listing **# 38**
1888 Listowel Rd., Elmira Tel. 669-0795

Marhaven Farms Map Listing **# 44**
161 Hawkesville Rd., St. Jacobs Tel. 664-2762

Allen and Lovina Martin Map Listing **# 46**
7140 Line 86, Elmira Tel. 669-1693

Edgar B. Martin Map Listing **# 47**
2280 Kressler Rd., St. Clements Tel. 699-4138

Solomon and Esther Martin Map Listing **# 50**
1183 Northfield Dr. East, Elmira Tel. 664-1471

Martin's Family Fruit Farm Map Listing **# 52**
1420 Lobsinger Line, Waterloo Tel. 664-2750

Rothdale Farm Map Listing **# 62**
1332 Lisbon Rd., Wellesley Tel. 656-2885

J. Steckle Heritage Homestead Map Listing **# 69**
811 Bleams Rd., Kitchener Tel. 748-5719

"A *peel* ing Apples!

History and Origins

Apples are the most important tree fruit crop in Canada and the fourth most important worldwide after all citrus, grapes, and banana. That's pretty impressive for a fruit that originally yielded little in terms of edible substance. The wild apple of ancient Asia would never have made it to the modern table in its uncultivated form. The wild trees produced hundreds of tiny fruits that were sour and consisted mostly of small, brown seeds and core, hardly worth gnawing on. Such seeds in Turkey have been carbon dated to 6500 BC.

It is believed that the early Roman horticulturalists were responsible for cultivating the wild apples into the fleshy, sweet, and juicy fruits that we so enjoy eating today. Pliny the Elder, in 23 CE, described 37 different varieties of cultivated apples in his ***Historia naturalis.*** Apples were introduced by the Romans as far as England and by 1640, a horticulturist named Parkinson noted 60 varieties. In 1866, ***Downing's Fruits*** recorded 643 different cultivars of apples. Today, nearly 10,000 different varieties of apples are grown in all temperate regions of the world.

Apples were first introduced to Atlantic Canada by French settlers in the early 1600s. Each homestead would have had several trees since the fruit could be dried and used throughout the winter. The maritime climate was favourable for apple production and in 1862 Nova Scotia apples were being showcased in an exhibition in London, England to wide acclaim.

Apples made their way across the Prairies, and were introduced into Manitoba in 1874 using stock from Ontario and Russia. The discovery of the warm Okanagan Valley proved to be a boon for apple production in British Columbia.

The MacIntosh Apple

Historical records in Ontario show that apple propagation took place as early as 1790 in the Niagara region. By 1880, 84 apple varieties were in production including the most famous of them all, the McIntosh. In 1811, John McIntosh of Dundas County, Ontario discovered a single hybrid tree growing in a small orchard on his newly purchased farm. This tree produced a particularly red, sweet-tasting, crisp apple. Originally called Granny Apples, they were enjoyed by friends and neighbours, but no one knew how to produce more trees like that one, a situation that challenged John's son, Allen, born in 1815 as the ninth child in a family of 13. He learned that planting the seed from the core would not produce the same fruit nor could bees carrying pollen. A chance encounter with an American who knew how to propagate trees through grafting allowed Allen to create an entire orchard of McIntoshes.

The survival of the variety, and its ultimate popularity almost 200 years after its chance discovery, was the long-time effort of several generations of the McIntosh family. Allen's nephew, Harvey Austin, expanded the small nursery by marketing thousands of trees throughout the province and into the northern United States. By 1910 the McIntosh had reached British Columbia and was the parent used in breeding such varieties as Cortland and Empire.

When a fire swept through the McIntosh farm in 1895, Allen managed to nurse back to health the badly singed original tree that was still producing apples. In fact the tree outlived him. Allen died in 1899, but the tree continued to bear fruit until 1906. Today, more than 3,000,000 McIntosh apple trees flourish throughout North America.

Horticulture

The closest relatives of the apple include other fruit trees such as pear, cherry, peach, and plum. All of these trees are actually members of the rose family, which can be clearly observed in the blossoms that are so much alike in form to a rose. The native, wild apples would have resembled the dry, seedy fruits of the rose.

Buying and Storing Apples

Look for firm apples, free of wrinkles and bruises. Remove any fruit that are overripe because they give off ethylene gas that causes other apples to ripen too quickly and spoil. Overripe apples can be trimmed and used for pies or applesauce.

Apples should be stored in the refrigerator in their original plastic bag for up to one month. Larger quantities can be storied in a cool, dark, well-ventilated place such as a fruit cellar or garage.

Apples can also be frozen and stored in the freezer. Peel, core, and slice the apples, and then submerge in a solution of salt water (1L of water to ½ tsp of salt) for 15 minutes. Rinse them off and blanch in boiling water for 1 minute. Cool under running water and dry off. To avoid clumps of frozen fruit, arrange slices in a single layer on trays and freeze until thoroughly frozen. Remove and quickly transfer to freezer bags for long-term freezer storage.

Did you know?

Most mature apple trees typically produce 5-10 bushels of apples each year.

An Apple a Day….

One of the most popular expressions of the 19th century was "An apple a day will keep the doctor away", and with good reason. The chief dietetic value of apples lies in the malice and tartaric acids that improve the digestibility of not only the apple itself, but also other foods. Popular instinct long ago led to the association of apple sauce with such rich foods as pork and goose, or of a slice of cheese on top of apple pie. Apples contain pectin, a soluble fiber that encourages the growth of beneficial bacteria in the digestive tract, as well as reduces cholesterol and sugar in the blood. If these aren't enough reasons to eat your apple today, there's more. An apple acts as an excellent "toothpaste" by cleaning the teeth with its juices and by mechanically pushing back the gums so that these areas can be cleared of trapped food.

What makes an apple so tasty? The flavour is a superb blend of tartness, sweetness, bitterness, and aroma that awakens the senses. Two natural sugars, sucrose and fructose, provide the sweetness and constitute 9-12% of the fruit. The malic and citric acids contribute about 1% of the total fruit, and the astringent tannins average 0.2%. The familiar aroma is a complex combination of 250 trace chemicals such as volatile esters, alcohol, and aldehydes.

It is a good idea to eat apples with their skin as the soluble fibre content is increased, and as much as half of the vitamin C content is found just underneath the skin.

5 Reasons to Eat an Apple a Day!

Your Diet - Apples are the perfect, portable snack: great tasting, energy-boosting, and free of fat.

Your Heart - Research confirms it! The antioxidant phytonutrients found in apples help fight the damaging effects of LDL (bad) cholesterol.

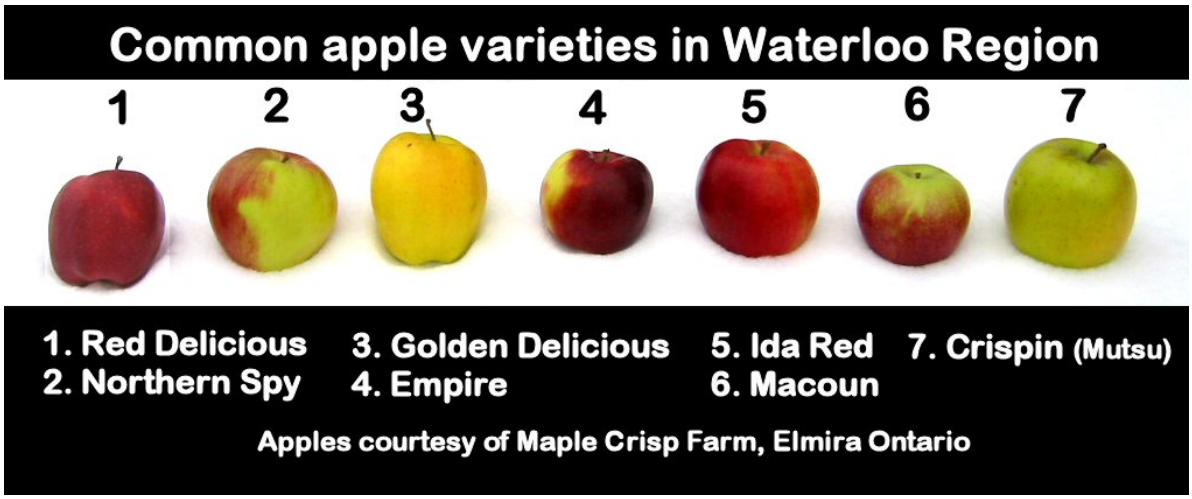
Your Digestion - Just one apple provides as much dietary fiber as a serving of bran cereal. (That's about one-fifth of the recommended daily intake of fiber.)

Your Lungs - An apple a day strengthens lung function and can lower the incidence of lung cancer, as well.

Your Bones - Apples contain the essential trace element, boron, which has been shown to strengthen bones - a good defense against osteoporosis.

Did you know?

Apple trees are valued not only for their delicious fruits, but for their wood that is used for making mallet heads and golf clubs. Pieces of apple wood add excellent flavour to smoked foods, and the split wood makes ideal fire logs.



Apple Production in Ontario and Waterloo Region

- In 2003, Ontario had 18,000 acres of apples in commercial production (138 acres in Waterloo Region)
- Waterloo Region produced 2,898,000 pounds of apples in 2003—an estimated farm value of $617,000
- Nearly one third of Ontario's commercial apple crop was of the Macintosh variety (32%), followed by Empire (16.5%), and Red Delicious (13%)