

September Uncommon Report

Harbingers of Fall – Specialty Apples

With over 2,500 varieties of apples grown in the U.S. today, of which 100 are grown commercially, why do chefs, home cooks and foodies keep using/eating the same dozen or so varieties? There is nothing wrong with Fuji, Gala and Golden Delicious apples, but come fall, there is a glorious variety of commercial 'heirloom' and newly developed apple varieties offering complex flavors that make eating apples a whole new experience. If you don't try some of the unusual varieties with their brief window of availability, you'll miss out on some of the best flavors of the season.

Most of the following apple varieties are good for cooking, baking, adding to salads or eating out-of-hand, though each has its own particular qualities and attributes.

Gravenstein – Originally developed in Denmark, these early season round-shaped apples sport a red and green skin and creamy-colored flesh. Gravensteins have a complex sweet/tart flavor, crisp texture and hold their shape well when baked. They make a deliciously tart applesauce or cider. Barry Salinas, chef/owner of Red's Apple Roadhouse in Sebastopol featured pork chops smothered in local Gravensteins sautéed with onions in the Chefs Tent at the recent [Gravenstein Apple Fair](#).

Winesap – A small, tart apple developed in Virginia in the early 19th century, Winesaps have pink to pale green skin with yellow flesh. Like many heirloom apples, Winesap store well in a cool, dark environment. In the southern U.S., they are a late harvest apple, available starting in September. Possessing a highly aromatic taste, look for Winesap apple cider to create a tart, smoky marinade. For a bold-flavored relish, use Winesap apples with fresh horseradish, sugar lemon and crème fraîche. Chef David Chang of Momofuku Noodle Bar uses Winesap apples in his [Apple and Smoked-Bacon Salad with Lychees and Chili Nuts](#)—Asian flavors fused with classic all-American favorites—apples and bacon.

Cripps Pink – Known commercially as Pink Lady®, this is a recently developed variety imported from Western Australia. It's a medium-sized apple, with mostly pink to red skin (from its Red Delicious ancestry) with some green. A very late season apple, the Cripps Pink becomes available in North America in November. This attractive variety is mostly eaten fresh, as it has a very mild flavor that does not hold up well to cooking. However, diced Pink Lady apples are a delicious addition to a salad of baby spinach, dried cranberries, a crumbled blue cheese and pistachios.



Empire – This variety, developed in New York State in the 1940s, is the text-book vision of a red apple. Descended from McIntosh and Red Delicious apples, it has a beautiful deep maroon skin and crisp

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white flesh that's resistant to bruises. Like McIntosh apples, the Empire has an unusual but appealing wine-like flavor with melon undertones. Empires are a late season apple and found primarily in the Eastern U.S. These apples are at their best eaten as fresh from the tree as possible, maybe accompanied by a sharp New York Cheddar cheese. If you want to make an apple crumble using Empire apples, add in some Golden Delicious or Honeycrisps, as they bring a little tartness and firm texture to the Empire's sweet, juicy characteristics.

Northern Spy – Grown extensively in Michigan, the Northern Spy is picked in late October to November and will store well for up to three months. It's an old-fashioned American style apple that's been popular since it was first developed in the 1840s. The skin is almost equally red and green with white to creamy yellow flesh. The North Spy apple is a versatile fruit, performing well whether eaten fresh, cooked, baked, sautéed or juiced. You can't go wrong using Northern Spy apples in classic applications such as pies, tarts and cobblers. Used fresh in fruit or green salads or serve alongside honey, cheeses and nuts, this apple will provide great flavor.



Arkansas Black– This heirloom variety has been around since the 1870s but has recently been receiving well-deserved attention from chefs and consumers. Arkansas Blacks are grown in California, Washington, Oregon, Ohio and of course Arkansas. The season is short—just a few weeks in October—so when you see these beauties available, buy them. Arkansas Black apples have deep maroon skin that becomes almost black in storage. The flavor starts out bright and tart, then develops hints of nutmeg, coriander, vanilla and anise the longer it's kept in storage. But like most apples, Arkansas Blacks are destined for pie. Chef/owner Diep Tran, of [The Good Girl Dinette](#) in Highland Park, CA is famous for her apple pie made with Arkansas Black apples. Chef Tran adds ground coriander to her pie, which gives a slightly exotic taste to this icon of American cuisine. The flesh of the Arkansas Black has a dry texture and for a 21st century twist, sprinkle with little salt, lime and dried chilies (like jicama).



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