

Farm to Table - Apples: An American Classic

'Tis the season for apple delights, from appetizers to desserts.

By Michelle Bender

The hardy, versatile apple is such a valuable farm staple that the Pilgrims brought seeds with them to the New World in the early 1600s. Settlers (including Johnny Appleseed – yes, there really was such a man!) took the seeds west, crossbreeding and grafting their favorites to get the astounding number of varieties available in the United States today. Wherever you run across the site of an old farmstead, you're sure to find some apple trees.

If you've eaten your fill of fresh apples from your harvest, set some aside in a cool, dry spot to enjoy later, and still have plenty left over, try the recipes below to take advantage of your orchard's bounty.

Apple and Brie Soup

Ingredients:

¾ cup chopped onion
½ cup thinly sliced leeks
1 ½ lb. tart apples, peeled, cored, and cut into 2-inch chunks
6 cups chicken broth
2 bay leaves
1 tsp. dried thyme
8 cups heavy cream
6 small red potatoes, peeled and diced in ½-inch chunks
1 whole branch fresh rosemary
1 lb. Brie cheese, softened, rind removed, and cut into chunks

Salt and white pepper to taste

For garnish: 1 tart apple; fresh rosemary sprigs

Preparation:

In a heavy-bottomed stock pot, heat onions, leeks and apples over medium-low to medium heat. Stirring often, stew the mixture in its own juices until the onions are soft. Add the broth, bay leaves and thyme. Increase heat and bring to a gentle boil; cook until onions are completely tender. Remove bay leaves.

In a separate heavy-bottomed pot, combine cream, potatoes and a whole rosemary branch. Heat to a gentle boil over medium-high heat and simmer on medium-low heat until potatoes are completely cooked. Remove the rosemary branch.

Combine ingredients of both pots. Working in batches, puree mixture in blender, adding cheese bit by bit. Season with salt and white pepper to taste.

To serve, heat through over low heat (do not boil). Garnish individual servings with very thin slices of tart apple and sprigs of fresh rosemary. Makes 3 to 4 quarts.

Curried Apple and Onion Sauté

This simple, somewhat sweet side dish is a wonderful complement to roast pork or turkey.

Ingredients:

4 firm, tart apples, cored and cut into wedges
1 medium yellow onion, peeled and thinly sliced
3 to 5 T. butter
1 to 2 T. mild curry powder (depending on taste)

Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

Preparation:

In a heavy-bottomed sauce pan over medium heat, melt the butter, add onions and sauté until they become translucent. Add the apples and continue sautéing, adding one or two more tablespoons of butter if necessary, until apples are not quite tender (do not overcook). Add the curry powder, salt and pepper; toss to coat. Makes 4 side-dish servings.

Apple Bread

Ingredients:

¼ cup shortening
1 cup sugar
2 eggs, well-beaten
2 cups flour
1 tsp. baking powder
1 tsp. baking soda
1/2 tsp. salt
2 cups coarsely grated raw, peeled apple (any kind)
1 T. finely grated lemon peel
2/3 cup chopped walnuts

Preparation:

Heat oven to 350 degrees, and grease and flour an 8- by 5-inch loaf pan.

Cream shortening and sugar together until fluffy; beat in eggs. Sift together flour, baking powder, soda and salt; gradually add to egg mixture, alternating with portions of the grated apple. Stir in lemon peel and walnuts. The batter will be stiff.

Spoon into prepared pan and bake for 50 to 60 minutes, until toothpick inserted in middle comes out clean and top is nicely browned. Cool thoroughly; do not slice until cold.

Canned Apple Pie Filling

This tasty pie filling comes in handy for fast wintertime desserts--use it to make apple pie or apple crisp, or serve warm over ice cream, pancakes or waffles.

Ingredients:

Peeled, cored and sliced apples (any kind) to fill 6 one-quart jars
4 ½ cups sugar
1 cup cornstarch
2 tsp. cinnamon
½ tsp. nutmeg
10 cups water
3 T. lemon juice

Preparation:

Pack apple slices tightly into the hot, sterilized quart jars. Measure sugar into a heavy-bottomed Dutch oven or stock pot. Sift together cornstarch, cinnamon and nutmeg; stir well to combine with sugar. Gradually add water, whisking vigorously to remove lumps. Cook over medium-high heat, stirring often, until thickened and bubbly. Remove from heat and stir in lemon juice.

Using a ladle and canning funnel, pour syrup over packed apples in jars, leaving a ¾-inch headspace. Slide a butter knife between mixture and sides of jar to remove any air bubbles; add more syrup if necessary. Wipe rims of jars, seal with prepared lids and rings, and process in a boiling water bath for 20 minutes. Makes 6 quarts.

*These recipes first appeared in the September/October 2005 issue of Hobby Farms magazine.