

A Brief Apple History

The apple emerged as a celebrated fruit at the beginning of the peopling of Earth. Whether you start with Adam and Eve or the anthropological data on Stone Age man in Europe, the apple was there. Greek and Roman mythology refer to apples as symbols of love and beauty. When the Romans conquered England about the first century B.C., they brought apple cultivation with them. William Tell gained fame by shooting an apple off his son's head at the order of invaders of Switzerland.

The Pilgrims discovered crabapples had preceded them to America, but the fruit was not very edible. The Massachusetts Bay Colony requested seeds and cuttings from England, which were brought over on later voyages of the Mayflower. Other Europeans brought apple stock to Virginia and the Southwest, and a Massachusetts man, John Chapman, became famous for planting trees throughout Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois (his name became "Johnny Appleseed"). Seeds from an apple given to a London sea captain in 1820 are sometimes said to be the origin of the State of Washington apple crop (now the largest in the US).

As the country was settled, nearly every farm grew some apples. Although some were very good, most of the early varieties would be considered poor today. Of nearly 8000 varieties known around the world, about 100 are grown in commercial quantity in the US., with the top 10 comprising over 90% of the crop.

Our modern orchards combine the rich heritage of apple growing with research and field trials to grow an annual US crop exceeding 220,000,000 bushels. New varieties are still being discovered and cultivated, with the best eventually becoming "household words" like McIntosh, Delicious, Empire, Rome, Spartan, Cortland, Granny Smith, etc. Recent arrivals include Fuji, Braeburn, Liberty, and more than a few "throwbacks" to antique varieties enjoying a resurgence.

It can certainly be said that an apple combines the best attributes of "something old and something new."