

A Bushel of Fun

PICK YOUR OWN APPLES FOR FARM-FRESH FALL FLAVOR

County Lines Staff



THERE'S NOTHING QUITE LIKE PICKING APPLES on an autumn afternoon. Admiring the fall foliage as you drive down idyllic country roads, romping through the orchard with family and friends, taking a bite out of a ripe, crisp apple just plucked from the branch. And, of course, bringing home delicious fall goodies to enjoy for days — and perhaps weeks — to come. It's the perfect weekend adventure.

We're lucky to live in Pennsylvania, which boasts one of the longest and most diverse apple seasons in the country. From mid-July to early November, dozens of varieties come into season, from the tart and crunchy to the sweet and juicy. It's no wonder we're surrounded by a bushel of apple orchards ready to welcome you and your family.



Dating back nearly three centuries, **Barnard's Orchard** in Kennett Square has been a go-to destination for generations of apple lovers. Most years, they grow around 20 varieties of apples, though pick-your-own options vary throughout the season — check Farmer Lewis' Facebook posts to see what's available. If you're lucky, you might catch an applesauce-making demo, a true fall treat.

Just outside Media, **Indian Orchards** is a family-run orchard with over 110 years of history. Take your pick of a variety of sustainably grown, pesticide-free apples, from Honeycrisp to heirlooms from century-old trees. Before you leave, drop by the farmstand for a jug of freshly pressed apple cider — you can even watch them make it — and other local goodies.

Or take a drive out to Boyertown, home of **Frecon Farms**. Celebrating 80 years, this third-generation family farm is fun for all ages. Take a hayride around the orchard to find the perfect apple. Afterwards, enjoy live music, hard cider on tap for grown-ups and a play area for kiddos. You can even cut your own zinnias for a bright addition to your table.

Wherever you go, you're bound to come home with enough apples to keep the doctor away until next fall.

So, time to get cooking! From gooey desserts to scrumptious spreads, there's loads you can do with the humble apple. Plus, you can dry or freeze any leftovers so you can keep enjoying those comforting fall flavors long after the season has passed.

Read on for our staff's favorite apple recipes and fill your kitchen with the aromas of autumn.

Caramel Apple Cheesecake

Everyone has their own favorite apple pie recipe. For something a little different, how about a cheesecake? Passed down to Associate Editor Shannon Montgomery by her grandmother, this caramel apple cheesecake is a decadent and delicious way to enjoy a classic fall flavor combo.



Serves 12

- 1½ C. graham cracker crumbs
- ¾ C. sugar
- ¼ C. butter, melted
- 14 oz. caramels (Brach's Milk Maid recommended)
- 1.5 oz. can evaporated milk
- ½ C. pecans, chopped
- 2, 8-oz. packages cream cheese
- 2 eggs
- 1½ C. apples (about 2 medium apples), chopped
- 1 T. flour
- ½ tsp. cinnamon

Preheat oven to 350°. Combine graham cracker crumbs, ¼ C. sugar and butter. Press into the bottom and 1 inch up the sides of a 9-inch springform pan.

Place caramels in a 2-quart heavy saucepan. Add evaporated milk and melt over high heat, stirring until smooth. Reserve ½ C. of caramel mixture, then pour the remainder over the crust. Sprinkle ¼ C. pecans over caramel mixture.

In a large bowl, beat cream cheese and remaining ½ C. sugar until smooth. Add eggs one at a time, beating until smooth after each addition. Toss together 1 C. apples, flour and cinnamon, then fold into cream cheese mixture.

Spoon mixture into cake pan. Bake for 40 minutes.

Combine reserved caramel mixture and remaining ½ C. apples. Spread caramel and apple mixture onto cheesecake, then sprinkle remaining pecans on top. Bake for 15 more minutes.

Loosen cake and let cool before removing from the pan. Chill before serving.

Jewish Apple Cake

This quick and simple recipe has been in our editor Jo Anne Durako's family for three generations — from her great-aunt, Rose Kennedy. Although it can be made with fresh apples, canned apple pie filling is much easier and makes a very moist cake. Perfect for breakfast, tea, snack or dessert.



Serves 16

- 2 C. sugar
- 1 C. vegetable oil
- 4 eggs
- ½ C. orange juice
- 2½ tsp. vanilla extract
- 1 T. baking powder
- 3 C. unsifted flour
- 1, 21-oz. can apple pie filling*
- ¼ C. cinnamon-sugar combination (1:4 ratio)

Preheat oven to 350°. Mix the first seven ingredients in a bowl (sugar through flour). Beat until smooth.

Pour half the batter into a well-greased Turk's head baking pan (or tube baking pan).

Place half the can of apple pie filling on top of the batter. Sprinkle with half the cinnamon sugar.

Add remaining batter. Top with remaining apple pie filling, pushing apples mostly below the surface. Sprinkle with remaining cinnamon sugar on top.

Bake for 1+ hour. Test for doneness using a knife until it comes out clean. Let cool about 15 minutes before removing from the pan. Finish cooling on a wire rack.

*A can of apple pie filling equals about 5–6 peeled, cored, sliced apples. If you use fresh apples, toss them in the cinnamon-sugar mixture before adding to the batter layers.

Classic Vienna Apple Strudel

This crowd-pleasing recipe comes from one of our account executives, Ivana Samsonova. It's perfect for parties or even a midday snack. She recommends serving it with coffee or vanilla ice cream.



Serves 12

For the dough:

2 C. all-purpose flour
Pinch of salt
1 egg
3½ T. unsalted butter, melted

For the filling:

6½ C. shredded apples
¼ C. granulated sugar
¼ C. walnuts or pecans, finely chopped
½ C. raisins
Zest of 1 lemon (optional)
3 T. ground cinnamon (or to taste)
½ C. plain breadcrumbs
7 T. unsalted butter, melted, for brushing

To make the dough:

In a mixing bowl, combine flour and salt. Add the egg, butter and ⅓ C. lukewarm water. Mix until the dough comes together, then knead until smooth and elastic, about 8 to 10 minutes by hand. Cover and let rest in a warm place for at least 30 minutes.

To make the filling:

While the dough rests, shred apples and squeeze out excess juice using a clean kitchen towel or cheesecloth. In a large bowl, combine the apples with sugar, nuts, lemon zest (if using) and cinnamon. Mix well and set aside.

Use 'Em or Lose 'Em!

Went a little wild at the orchard and picked more apples than you need? It happens to the best of us. Our former Food Editor, Laura Muzzi Brennan, recommends two methods to make your apples last for months to come.

Dried Apples

Preheat oven to 225°. Wash and slice apples into ¼-inch pieces, thinner if you want to make apple chips. No need to peel or core.

Line a few baking sheets with parchment paper. Lay apple slices in a single layer with a little space between them. Sprinkle with pumpkin pie spice or cinnamon, or leave plain.

Bake for 1 hour. Flip slices over and bake for 1 hour more, until slices start to curl up at the edges.

Let cool. Store in an airtight container in a cool, dark place.

Frozen Apples

Fill a bowl with water and add lemon juice, about 1 T. per gallon of water.

Peel and core apples. Slice into desired shape.

Dip apples in water. *Tip:* If you have a colander that fits right into a bowl, just throw the apple slices in, dip in water, remove and shake off excess water.

Line a few baking sheets with parchment paper. Lay apple slices in a single layer with a little space between them.

Place baking sheets in freezer for 1 hour or more, until frozen through.

Store in freezer bags for up to 6 months.

To make the strudel:

Preheat oven to 350°. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Divide rested dough in half. On a floured surface, roll out one piece into a large, thin rectangle. If needed, gently stretch the dough with your hands until it's paper-thin, almost see-through.

Sprinkle half the bread crumbs evenly across the dough. Spread half the apple mixture over breadcrumbs, leaving about an inch border around the edges. Fold the short sides in and gently roll up the strudel from the long side, tucking it in tightly.

Transfer to the prepared baking sheet, seam-side down. Brush generously with melted butter. Repeat with second half of dough and filling.

Place both strudels on the baking sheet and bake for about 40 minutes, or until golden brown and crisp. (Every oven is different, so keep an eye on them.)

Let cool slightly, then slice diagonally into thick pieces. Dust with powdered sugar before serving. Best enjoyed warm.

Apple Butter

Have an abundance of apples after a day at the orchard? Enter apple butter: a smooth spread that can be enjoyed all season long. It's simple to make, but time-consuming — definitely worth it! Spread it on toast, dollop on pancakes or waffles, or add to your baked goods. Adapted from New York Times Cooking.



PHOTO CREDIT: WHITNEY IN CHICAGO

Makes about 4 cups

4 lb. apples, cut into 1-inch chunks, peels and cores reserved (about 10 to 12 medium apples)
½ C. apple cider vinegar
3 allspice berries
2 cinnamon sticks
1, 2-inch piece of ginger, peeled and sliced
1 star anise pod
1¼ C. sugar
1 C. light brown sugar
Kosher salt

In a large, heavy-bottomed pot, combine apples, vinegar and spices with 4 C. water. Secure apple peels and cores in a square of cheesecloth and add to pot. Bring to a simmer, then reduce heat to medium-low.

Cook, stirring occasionally, until apples have completely softened and liquid has reduced by half, around 30 to 40 minutes. Remove from heat and let cool slightly before setting aside softened apples, discarding everything else.

Preheat oven to 300°. Place apples into a 9 x 13-inch baking dish. Add white and brown sugar, then stir to dissolve. Place baking dish in oven and let cook, stirring about every 30 minutes, for about 3 to 3½ hours or until mixture is thick, glossy and a deep, golden brown.

Test thickness by spooning some onto a plate — the mixture should set almost immediately, not spread or be watery. When the

Apple Picking 101

Ready to hit the orchard? Here are some pro tips to make the most of your apple-picking experience.

1. Know before you go. Apple-picking conditions can change based on weather, availability and crop status. Check online or call ahead to find out which varieties are available, potential weather closures, and whether they accept cash or cards. Some orchards require advanced reservations, especially for large groups.

2. Come prepared. Dress comfortably and appropriately for the weather. Fields can be muddy or uneven, so wear closed-toed shoes or boots. Especially early in the season, pack sunscreen and water. Some orchards provide containers for your apples, while others are BYO bag or basket.

3. Pick the perfect apple. Look for apples that are firm, smooth and mostly bruise-free. Apples come in all shades of red, yellow and green, so it's hard to determine ripeness by color — ask if you're unsure. A good rule of thumb is to work from the outside in — apples on the outer branches ripen first. Look for the apples that are furthest from the base of the tree.

4. Pick your apple properly. Once you've found a good apple, lift it upwards and twist gently. A ripe apple will easily release from the branch. Don't pull the fruit down or straight towards you, and definitely don't shake the tree — you'll end up with a shower of apples, not to mention damage the trees. Make sure kids know how to treat apple trees with care.

5. Transport with care. Be gentle with your apples. Grasp them in the palm of your hand, not with your fingers. When you're toting your apples, place them down gently — dropping or throwing them into your container can cause bruising. Don't let the fruits of your labor go to waste!



mixture reaches the desired consistency, season with a small pinch of kosher salt.

Store in an airtight container and refrigerate for 3 to 4 weeks. For longer storage, freeze or can in a sterile mason jar. ♦