



## Best varieties...or those to avoid?

Posted by [Pat Pryal](#)

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[Pat Pryal](#)

[Best varieties...or those to avoid?](#)

March 16, 2016 09:16PM

Registered: 7 years ago

Posts: 76

I was wondering if those of you who have been growing apples for a while now could comment on some of the varieties I am going to be trying in my orchard? I have too many varieties for sure, and will undoubtedly whittle the list down to 20-30 of the best tasting/selling. If anyone has an opinion on any of the apples I list as being just not a good variety to mess with please say so. I realize that the same variety can be quite different in different parts of the country with regards to taste, disease, ripening, etc.. I will not be using any apples for cider, only as dessert apples. Drops and blemished apples I can sell to hunters for deer bait.

Here is the list:

Akero, Arlet, Hidden Rose (red flesh), Canada Red, Berner Rosen, Black Oxford, Brock, Crimson Crisp, Empire, E. Spitzenburg, Elstar, Florina, Connell Red, Honeycrisp, Honeygold, Jefferis, Macoun, Mantet, Melrose, Opalescent, Orenco, Pixie Crunch, Pristine, Prairie Spy, Spigold, Redfree, RubINETTE, Spencer, Macintosh, Sandow, Spartan, Sansa, Snowsweet, Sweet Sixteen, Westfield SNF, Williams Pride, Winter Banana, Winesap, Tompkins CK, Zestar, Celestia, Haralred, Cox O.P., Calville BDH, Jonagold

thanks, Pat

Edited 1 time(s). Last edit at 03/16/2016 10:24PM by Pat Pryal.

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[Todd Parlo](#)

[Re: Best varieties...or those to avoid?](#)

March 18, 2016 06:14PM

Registered: 10 years ago

Posts: 301

I hope this will spur the group to comment on experiences with cultivars, as this is a little lacking on the site. I added three contributions from this list in the varieties section, which is where I think the info should be placed. I am eager to read what others have to say about some of the varieties on Pat's list.

[Walden Heights Nursery & Orchard](#)

Zone 3 in Vermont

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[Michael Phillips](#)

[Re: Best varieties...or those to avoid?](#)

March 18, 2016 09:51PM

**Moderator**

Registered: 11 years ago

Posts: 621

A few quick comments from the marketing angle for Pat. Otherwise I like Todd's approach of naming varieties one by one in this category for sharing observations about growth habit, timeline, keeping ability, and all that.

A good mix of apples counts for a lot in a community orchard as different people have different tastes. Love the color contrast of bushel boxes of Black Oxford next to Golden Russet. You do have to figure out the pace of ripening, holding your early crop to 10-15% of what's to come. Too many people don't get the wide apple window that exists on both side of peak foliage. Ultimately it comes down to offering taste samples to get beyond unfamiliar names and rougher appearance. Arlet gets wowser reception. Prairie Spy fails because its a keeping apple with little flavor at the time it's picked (and why I now call it Prairie Keeper). Heirlooms become winners when you share the lore. The marketing considerations I shared in *Apple Grower* still hold a dozen years later.

Take a minute and give Pat (and the rest of us) your take on marketing mix insights.

[Lost Nation Orchard](#)

Zone 4b in New Hampshire

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[Zea Sonnabend](#)

[Re: Best varieties...or those to avoid?](#)

March 19, 2016 08:33AM

Registered: 10 years ago

Posts: 58

I would like to comment on some but Pat hasn't really explained what he wants comments about. Just flavor? Growing characteristics and issues? Storability? Looks? Disease susceptibility. And he hasn't even said what zone or state so what does well for us in California might be terrible elsewhere. So if others give insight on what to say I can elaborate more. For now I'll just say that we don't like Florina too much, We planted Sweet Sixteen but it needs too many chill hours for us and will probably never bloom. Jonagold is one of our best all around apples, with its biggest issue that they get too big so we don't fertilize or thin it. We also really like Empire, RubINETTE, and Sansa.

[Fruilicious Farm](#)

Zone 9b in California

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[Kent Eddy](#)

[Re: Best varieties....or those to avoid?](#)

June 23, 2016 05:55AM

My two cents...

As dessert apples I can testify to Honeycrisp, Macoun, Jonagold, Sweet Sixteen and Spigold. Although Spigold runs biennial for me in mid-Michigan, Zone 5. Other favorite dessert apples (in order of best taste) are Shizuka, Dayton, Wealthy, Cortland, Fortune, and Smoothee. My earliest late-season (Mid Sept) apple, try a Richelieu. Is buffs up to a mirror-like shine you can actually see yourself in. They are sweet & juicy, yet soft like a McIntosh. See my video of it at [[www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)]

-Kent

zone 5

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[Paul Weir](#)

[Re: Best varieties....or those to avoid?](#)

July 31, 2016 12:31AM

I feel the heirlooms really get folks both interested and excited. I also have had my greatest success when tying in the lore of each variety . . . People are in pure wonder and amazement and they really seem to appreciate the history and importance of apples in the US from our earliest colonial beginnings.

Keep in mind that sometimes the flavors, of some heirlooms, can be ho-hum right off the tree, or even too assertive, and a good many of the heirlooms require some storage to really come into their own . . . If you can master that aspect, you can really bring some added delight to your clients apple enjoying experiences.

As marketing mixes go, I have had really good success with marrying groups of three apple types together, in a 9 apple bag, for sale as an "heirloom pie pack" for \$9 per bag (the apples average 9-12 ounces each, and are top quality and hand selected).

The cost, at \$9/pack, is not considered to be a bargain, but more of premium priced rare opportunity to try something they may never have experienced before . . . and here in my area of California, people really get jazzed about the combination of locally grown & heirloom combined.

I have used the following 3 apple groupings in these pie packs with good feedback

Ashmeads Kernal  
Calville Blanc d'Hiver  
Northern Spy

Rhode Island Greening  
Cox Orange Pippin  
Northern Spy

Arkansas Black  
Roxbury Russet  
Newtown Pippin

You can absolutely feel free to mix it up with what you have available, but keep in mind that not every apple is a wonderful partner in a pie crust. I look for a combo of a higher acid apple, with a complex sweet balanced apple, with a good structure 'work horse' pie apple (Northern Spy is really good in this last regard) . . . Don't have a particular style of apple to make the right blend for a pie? Perhaps consider some barter with another local apple farmer who has a variety you don't, and you two can both be better off. I like Michael's comment on the pleasing contrast that marrying two or more apples together in a box or display can have . . . loads of "Oooo" factor. Each of my pie pack combo's usually include a Green, a Red (or striped), and a russet . . . not only do these combinations make tasty pie foundations, they are also interesting to the eye of your customer and will help them build their confidence in apples that are well off the supermarket beaten path too

Fun huh!?

[Gopher Hill Apples](#)

Zone 8 in California

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[Paul Weir](#)

[Re: Best varieties....or those to avoid?](#)

July 31, 2016 12:50AM

Pat, I neglected to comment on any of your listed apples as ones of concern . . . Of your list, the one that catches my attention is Esopus Spitzenburg as it has been a bust for me here in my area of the California Sierra Foothills, at 2,700ft elevation, USDA Zone 8, in both southern and eastern exposures, in deep clay loam soils, under regular irrigation through the summer, with over 1,000 chilling hours annually, and with all the multi-season holistic love I could share with them . . . Growth was vigorous every year, but for me they have all been disease magnets, second to none, in my orchards. . . . Scab, Fireblight, Powdery Mildew, Summer Fruit Rots and more Burr Knotting that most too. . . after 8-9 years, of care, I have taken them all out.

This said, I have a friend who had a handful of organically grown Spitz trees at 1,100ft elevation in a south western exposure (some of the hottest

Registered: 7 years ago  
Posts: 5

**Moderator**

Registered: 11 years ago  
Posts: 187

**Moderator**

Registered: 11 years ago  
Posts: 187

areas of our county) that still achieved better than 800 hours of chilling annually and was able to crop those trees annually with all but none of the trouble I had with all of mine. . . Go figure!

Moral of the story, the location the trees will be placed in, the solar orientation, your slope location, the soils themselves, the soil nutrient balance in place at the time of planting, your latitude, the watering they will receive (rain only, irrigation, or both), local disease & insect pressures and more (maybe luck should be in that list) all play into the success that one apple farmer has with any given variety over another.

Thanks for bringing this topic up with the HON forum, Pat.

Cheers!

[Gopher Hill Apples](#)  
Zone 8 in California

[Reply](#) [Quote](#)

[Pat Pryal](#)

[Re: Best varieties....or those to avoid?](#)

July 31, 2016 05:56AM

Registered: 7 years ago

Posts: 76

Thanks Paul. So far I have eliminated about 5 varieties that I am going to graft (bud) over in August. But I'm adding at least 3 others ( Suntan, King David and Kestrel ) I'm sure I will eventually whittle the number of varieties down by another 10 or so. I have about 50 varieties now. I currently have about 450 trees in the ground. I lost about 8 during the transplanting process, not sure why, they leafed out and then just kind of stopped growing and died. Not too bad I guess considering how many I moved. I'm sure there will be some varieties that just won't do well here for one reason or another, and I'll change them out for those that do well. There may end up being a few varieties that run out of time before they ripen properly. We usually get a hard freeze here about mid October, and several light frosts before then.

We've had adequate rainfall this year so far, I only had to water them once earlier this summer. The foliage on my trees look wonderful, nothing but nice green leaves, no spots, no mildew and no more leafrollers or aphids. The trees are putting on nice growth for the most part and I've been busy staking them all to keep the leaders straight and prevent any of last years chip buds from breaking off in the wind. As I've mentioned before, I have never seen any scab on any of my apple trees, even those up by the house where it is fairly shaded are clean, and never any of those nasty bugs that a lot of people have to contend with, hope it stays that way !

Right now I'm battling the unwanted growth that is coming up everywhere. The orchard was wooded and cleared last year and there are hundreds of aspen shoots coming up along with a million different kinds of weeds. Some of which I have never seen before, anywhere ! I've got about 3/4 of the orchard sprayed and pretty much cleaned up. I'll be planting the aisles in early September with a pasture grass/alfalfa mix.

I hope to start putting down wood chips late this fall. The tree service guys just dumped another load of great deciduous chips last week. Should have enough now to get a good 3' circle around every tree, along with another heaping of compost as well.

I really like your marketing mix, which I was at that stage, but it'll be at least another 3-4 years before I'm hopefully selling apples. I can not wait to just be able to taste some of the varieties I'm growing. Right now I have to buy apples in the grocery store, and they are SOOOO bland. The trees in my yard don't have much this year, they were all biennial when we moved here. I have no idea what they are, but they are good eating and make good pies.

take care, Pat

Brampton Lake Orchards

Zone 4a Upper Michigan

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[Zea Sonnabend](#)

[Re: Best varieties....or those to avoid?](#)

August 13, 2016 07:45AM

Michael Phillips Wrote:

- 
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  - > community orchard as different people have
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  - >
  - > Take a minute and give Pat (and the rest of us)
  - > your take on marketing mix insights.

Registered: 10 years ago

Posts: 58

For us it is all about getting early apples to market before Washington state floods the market and lowers the price. So we have been focusing both on a good mix of early apples and then late season ones that store well because in a world of Fuji there needs to be more interesting flavor in late fall and winter. We did our first farmers market last weekend with Gravensteins, Gala, Elstar, and Pink Pearl. This week we will add Chehalis. We hope to have Sansa and Akane to add to the early season mix in future years, and early Fuji will be shortly behind these. By the time we get our Red Delicious off the trees at the end of August, there will be tons of WA Galas everywhere and we will want to avoid the wholesale markets.

My concept would be to try to have about 6 varieties available at the markets each week, with up to 12 in the middle of the season. I like Paul's idea of a pie mix and we might try that later in the season. We not only push the stories of heirlooms, but also the heritage of our Apple growing location and its historical significance, having once been the biggest Apple producing region in the west and known for premium quality.

[Fruitilicious Farm](#)

Zone 9b in California

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[Michael Phillips](#)

[Re: Best varieties....or those to avoid?](#)

August 13, 2016 04:34PM

**Moderator**

Registered: 11 years ago

Posts: 621

Big smiley thing. It's worth saying that the word "early" has a regional construct to it. The apples of August in California are what ripen in New England in September, if not into October. Just as we apply the concept of degree days in spring to talk in terms of bud stage, rather than strict calendar dates, we need to think similarly about the harvest season. The fun thing about writing is all the interpretations that come back at a guy! I stick to the recommendation to not overdo "early apples" which in California's case means the pome fruit ripening in July, if not late June. Your marketing plan makes total sense to me, Zea.

[Lost Nation Orchard](#)

Zone 4b in New Hampshire

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