



Disease observations on cider varieties

Posted by [Marsha Lindner](#)

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[Marsha Lindner](#)

[Disease observations on cider varieties](#)

November 13, 2012 05:04AM

Registered: 11 years ago

Posts: 9

We taste tested 3 different ciders yesterday. We had Ashmead's Kernel, Claygate Pearmain and our orchard blend. Here in the Ohio River Valley, our best performer by far has been Ashmead. My tree was planted in 1997 on M7 rootstock. It has very little insect or disease damage. It also has no suckering and doesn't set large clusters of fruit so thinning is easy. This is in contrast to my Golden Russet that sets 5 fruits per cluster and is riddled by scab and insects. The russet fruit also holds up well to the fungal attack that hits us in August when our humidity level stays sultry for many weeks. This was my first year to have enough Claygate for a single pressing. I have been using a holistic approach and improving the general health of each tree and this one has clearly benefitted from the program.

My Foxwelp sets wonderful fruit but it always gets hammered by scab as does my Kingston Black.

Edited 1 time(s). Last edit at 11/14/2012 02:15AM by Michael Phillips.

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

[Michael Phillips](#)

[Re: Disease observations on cider varieties](#)

January 06, 2013 05:36PM

Moderator

Registered: 11 years ago

Posts: 621

The fact that cider apples can have a tad of spotting has really made we wonder why we don't see more organic cider on the market. *Scab run amuck* would be a big loss, certainly, but a modest spray program (be it minimal sulfur or the holistic approach) applied in accord with a thorough understanding of infection parameters readily keeps this prevalent apple disease in check going into the summer months. Key here is not screwing up the good microbe scene to such an extent that rots dominate in a wet July/August. Sooty blotch and flyspeck do not matter at all. And even secondary scab will be tolerable as it will be light spotting as opposed to sheet scab and cracking and thus heavy crop loss. These will be apples with a full array of phytoconstituents and flavor ... with a free probiotic coating to futher feed the fermenting yeast!

I've fruited but a few official cider apples here at this point -- Dabinett, Kingston Black, the classic russets, Wickson -- but will be adding considerably to this core part of an apple orchard this spring. Some of the trees rarin' to move out of my nursery include Virginia Hewes, Reinne de Pomme, Redfield, Harrison, Chisel Jersey, and Yarlinton Mill. All will be treated the same as the dessert varieties in the primary infection period but then I picture less spray intensity being required to bring the ciders to harvest.

[Lost Nation Orchard](#)

Zone 4b in New Hampshire

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

[Chad Frick](#)

[Re: Disease observations on cider varieties](#)

January 31, 2014 09:08AM

Registered: 9 years ago

Posts: 4

[transcendant_crabs.jpg](#)

My orchard has seen no spray of any kind since 2005, and the majority of my cider apple trees have never been sprayed...a matter of economic necessity rather than principle. I'm especially impressed with how consistently clean and disease-free the crabapples are. I can't recall ever having seen scabbing, and certainly no ruined fruit due to scab on my Transcendent Crabs or Hewe's Virginia Crabs. Here's a photo of a nice shiny clean batch of these Transcendent crabs, unculled. The trees are very strong and so far, disease-free. I'm so pleased with their response to their predicament that I've decided to experiment with more crabs of all kinds. My Foxwhelps, Muscat de Bernays and Wickson Crabs would be the next rung down for overall success under no spray conditions, with pretty good scab resistance. The Kingston Blacks and Porter's Perfections can get a bit scabby and cracked up because of it.

Vulture Hill Orchard

Zone 10a in California

Edited 1 time(s). Last edit at 01/31/2014 09:10AM by Chad Frick.

[Reply Quote](#)

[Todd Parlo](#)

[Re: Disease observations on cider varieties](#)

February 02, 2014 07:20PM

Registered: 10 years ago

Posts: 301

My experience has shown that crabs, unfortunately, are every bit as susceptible as larger apples.

Since such a large degree of our dessert apples were developed during the age of heavy chemical spraying, it makes sense that a lot of the crabs could be more proportionally resistant. There is however no distinction physiologically between apples and crabapples, the latter merely a size reduction. (Many consider crabs anything below 2" in diameter as an average representation of the fruit of said cultivar)

I have seen Wickson, Whitney, Siberian, Dolgo, Almata, and others with scab infection, although with varying degrees. Centennial and Chestnut crab seem better.

I look forward to seeing how the percentages work out; myself having a soft spot for crabs I hope testing shows them to be superior overall.

And nothing beats crabs for a flower show.

[Walden Heights Nursery & Orchard](#)

Zone 3 in Vermont

[Reply Quote](#)

[Paul Weir](#)

[Re: Disease observations on cider varieties](#)

February 02, 2014 11:15PM

Moderator

Registered: 11 years ago

Posts: 187

Hi Chad,

I am a crab apple fan too. Nice photo and thanks for sharing that.

Always appreciate orchardist observations!

Wish I could echo that those varieties were sure fire scab resistant

I get to visit a number of orchards and also see scab on various crab apples often. I only grow two types: Wickson and Hewes. I can say I have not had scab show on either variety, but I do manage for scab using a focused holistic spraying program and also keep up with my orchard fall cleanup procedures too.

First thing that comes to mind to share, for folks reading this thread, is that **scab is not a manifest destiny for apples** (as Michael so eloquently puts it) and I firmly believe that. In other words, just because we plant an apple tree doesn't mean we will see scab at a set point thereafter - no matter how susceptible the variety is. The fungus can come and go within a grower's immediate area and I have seen orchards where growers show me scab free varieties at their place, that I know for 100% certain are scab susceptible in other nearby orchards . . . given a strong enough fungal attack + a cultivar's susceptibility in any given year + how they are managed and more.

If we take luck out of the equation . . . I suspect you have your crab varieties in a setting that is conducive to healthy fruit growing, with relative isolation (or simply just a better setting . . . better air flow, immediate area dries quicker after rains or dew, etc.) to prime sources of infection (abandoned orchard ground, other nearby non-biologically managed orchards, etc). Of course I am just guessing . . . please do tell us more.

Though your Kingston blacks and some others do get scab, are they downwind from the crabs? Located on a different slope orientation? Are they larger more dense trees that tend to stay wetter/moist more often? Do you do something different with the management of the ground around the crabs that you don't do with the others? For example, mowing, composting or even grazing? . . . are all things considered equal in your orchard experiment?

All this said, congratulations on growing healthy apples and for making the connections with the good people that you do!

I see you are in zone 10a. What part of California? Sonoma or San Mateo Coast?

[Gopher Hill Apples](#)

Zone 8 in California

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[Chad Frick](#)

[Re: Disease observations on cider varieties](#)

February 03, 2014 02:51AM

Registered: 9 years ago

Posts: 4

Nice to hear your comments. Now that it's a topic of conversation, I'll keep closer track of my scab this year and try to come back with an update.

I'm in western Sonoma County, just on the coastal side of the boundary for 10a/b. The orchard is pretty isolated, bordered by large tracts of redwood forest on three sides. There are a few other orchards in my area, but the closest is only kitty corner to me and downwind. All are under similar management practices, in organic production, but no spray.

We get plenty of fog moisture in the Summer but it normally burns off by mid-day and airflow is quite good. The orchard is mostly old school 20 to 25 ft. spacing, and the oldest trees are seedling rootstock. Over time the orchard was replanted with semi-dwarf and even some dwarf trees, but with the original spacing. So added to the fact that many of the oldest trees don't have full canopies, having lost part of their structure due to breakage or disease over the years, there is lots of space for airflow between trees. Being on a hill, the cool air rolls down and settles at the valley bottom. The hot air seems make nice updrafts over the orchard too, compared to the surrounding forest, which leads to lots of impressive vulture circling and flybys and thus "Vulture Hill Orchard."

The Transcendent crabs are a block at the very bottom of the orchard hill, close to the edge of the forest. The rest of the orchard is downwind from them, though they are pretty much out of the wind altogether due to the height of the surrounding redwood forest and the hill. All the cider trees are the same age and size, planted in 2007, and they are managed the same: pruned regularly with the grass mowed, and plenty of grazing deer. The main difference is that the Transcendent and Hewe's crabs both have a lot of 100 year-old Gravensteins as neighbors. I planted them in those spots to help with pollinating the Gravs, as they are all early flowering. I see the surviving old Grav patches as indicators of wind protected areas, since they are all hollow and easy breakers. So if anything, the crabs are actually more protected from the wind than the other cider apples.

My hunch is that the main advantage the crabs may have is more air circulation around the fruit, due to the smaller size of the fruit, longer stems relative to fruit size. They hang there like cherries, pretty spread out on the branch without dense clusters. I don't normally thin the fruit on any of the trees, and that leads to tight clumps of fat apples on the other cider varieties.

Vulture Hill Orchard
Zone 10a in California

Edited 4 time(s). Last edit at 02/03/2014 05:07AM by Chad Frick.

[Reply Quote](#)

[Cameron Denning](#)

[Re: Disease observations on cider varieties](#)

March 26, 2015 09:57AM

Registered: 8 years ago

Posts: 5

We planted 1400 new whips this year and they all seem to be doing great, except for our Kingston Blacks. The KB we planted 2 years ago also suffer from what appears to be black rot. It looks like the fungus overwinters in buds...entering from last years leaf scars. The bark around the bud turns light brown and peels, with dark margins and swollen reddish-orange tissue beneath. It also affects larger sections of branches, and the ends of pruning cuts. This is somewhat widespread through our orchard, but only the Kingstons are having a hard time growing through it. I would attach a picture, but im not sure how to link it with a URL. I sent samples to WSU extension and they have had them for 2 weeks without any definitive answers yet. I am wondering if our high nitrogen soils and psuedomonas bacteria are making the trees less hardy, and more prone to frost damage. Could the Black rot be following winter damage? Or is it the cause? Is it even black rot? Questions i ask myself as i flip through books, articles, and wander through the orchard.

[Reply Quote](#)

[Todd Parlo](#)

[Re: Disease observations on cider varieties](#)

March 26, 2015 05:15PM

Registered: 10 years ago

Posts: 301

I will just comment on the Kingston Black as a cultivar. It is surely a full fledged movement at this point, this hard cider making interest. With this has come an equal infatuation with European cider varieties. It follows in the footsteps of the heirloom fruit movement. This is all great in a way, but it should be mentioned that in the early years of fruit growing in this country, many of the European types failed outright due to different growing conditions.

Kingston Black has been growing crummy up here for us in the north thus far, being weak with frequent dieback on new shoots. It also is repeatedly mentioned in literature as a poor and sporadic cropper. It is also noted as disease prone. It also apparently fails poorly in the south (Eliza may want to chime in here). Some can grow it, including Steve Woods at Poverty Lane in NH, but I have heard so many stories of its inadequacies that make me caution every one who calls here for scionwood or trees.

I have had some very nice single varieties from this one, but the cider makers of the world have an untold variety out there that will make some stellar brews, many of which lie unnamed and humble beside the nations country roads.

[Walden Heights Nursery & Orchard](#)

Zone 3 in Vermont

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[Cameron Denning](#)

[Re: Disease observations on cider varieties](#)

March 28, 2015 08:55AM

Registered: 8 years ago

Posts: 5

Thanks for the info Todd. It sounds like we need to grow out Kingston Blacks from seeds and see if we can find a new variety that flourishes in the north, with the same sought after fruit qualities. Do you know of any one who is doing such selections? I also wonder if rootstock selection has anything to do with the success of one variety to the next? We are growing them on M9 Rootstock. Could the M9 be insufficient at pulling up a specific nutrient that would make the KB thrive?

[Reply Quote](#)

[Claude Jolicoeur](#)

[Re: Disease observations on cider varieties](#)

March 29, 2015 07:01PM

Cameron Denning Wrote:

Registered: 11 years ago

Posts: 226

> Do you know of any one who is doing such
> selections?

Cameron, there are a lot of wild seedlings out there with great properties for cider making. As Todd says: «which lie unnamed and humble beside the nations country roads ». Very well said, Todd - I think I should quote you in the future edition of my book!

From my experience, about 1 out of 10 natural seedlings is a pretty good cider apple, and I have found quite a number of bittersweet apples that can rival named English or French true cider varieties. I found 3 new ones just last year, of which I took wood to bring in my orchard for further evaluation. Now, you may say that 1 out of 10 isn't much as odds, but if you think there are millions of natural seedlings growing out there by the roads or in the woods, there has to be thousands of fantastic cider apples out there, just waiting for us to discover them...

I certainly wouldn't put much energy to grow Kingston Black - I actually tried twice to graft it, and it died both times! Your odds might be better to go in the country during fall and taste the fruit of those wild trees. When you find one with a nice sweet and perfumed taste, not too acidic, and ideally with some bitterness or astringency, then mark it down!

Claude

[Jolicoeur Orchard](#)

Zone 4 in Quebec

Author, [The New Cider Maker's Handbook](#)

[Reply Quote](#)

[Cameron Denning](#)

[Re: Disease observations on cider varieties](#)

March 31, 2015 08:23AM

Registered: 8 years ago

Posts: 5

Great advice Claude! I would much rather have a unknown gem that requires little maintenance than the fussy KB. However, i am not ready to remove the trees from the orchard. I still would like to know what conditions are most favorable for the variety, or any special nutrients that have helped boost their immune response. Surely they have not made it this far through history being so finicky. I think i will start a new thread on Kingston Blacks specifically to hopefully draw some information from those like Steve Woods at Poverty Lane, who seem to have success growing it.

[\[www.finnriver.com\]](http://www.finnriver.com)

Zone 8 Chimaquum Washington. Peat soil high in nitrogen. M9 rootstock and trellised at 6 foot spacings. Varieties are all for hard cider.

[Reply Quote](#)

[Chad Frick](#)

[Re: Disease observations on cider varieties](#)

March 31, 2015 05:03PM

Registered: 9 years ago

Posts: 4

I second that Cameron. I'd like to hear more from successful KB growers too. One of the coolest things about growing Kingston Black, in my opinion, is that as one of the most popular single varieties, it gives us a chance to really compare terroir from different orchards and cidemakers in a way you just can't with a blended cider...and that's fun to do.

I haven't had the problems you describe on my KBs, but did have a touch of fireblight in them last year, which was a fireblight year here in Sebastopol. I had some fireblight hit the KBs, Muscat de Bernays, Porter's Perfection, and Foxwhelps (the one from trees of antiquity, which I am now resorting to calling the "Sonoma Foxwhelp") The Sonoma Foxwhelps got it quite bad and rat-tailed all the way into the Summer due to our warm Winter. I sprayed two rounds of copper on those fireblight affected trees, including KB when they were dormant to try and reduce it, in addition to removing all the affected buds and shoots when they got infected in the Spring. (The Transcendent and Hewe's crabs remained disease-free)

It didn't stop me from expanding KB patch a bit this year (from 3 to 10 trees), for exactly the reason I stated above. I've frameworked KB onto Macintosh and Rome Beauty now, as well as topworked a couple young P18 trees, which has effectively left them with Gravenstein interstem. Should be interesting to see if they act any differently than the straight-up KBs on MM111, which is what I have already.

Edited 1 time(s). Last edit at 03/31/2015 05:11PM by Chad Frick.

[Reply Quote](#)

[Eliza Greenman](#)

[Re: Disease observations on cider varieties](#)

May 17, 2015 12:01AM

Registered: 9 years ago

Posts: 23

I wanted to quickly chime in about KB. I had a real problem with very early season fruit drop in the wet Appalachian South (zone 6a) and I would repeatedly do iodine and brix tests to see how ripe they might be. 100% unripe, every time. I know that many traditional cider growers in the UK sweat the early drops so they can use them, but these dropped so prematurely that it wasn't an option. I couldn't detect any reason for the drop other than climate and irritability.

I recently went to the Finger Lakes and spent a couple days with John Reynolds of Daring Drake Farm (to learn how to graft nuts). Once I found out he was growing gobs of cider fruit, the conversation basically just surrounded that. He said that he has been successfully growing KB and it's one of his most reliable bearers. At the time, the NY Fruit Quarterly had come out with an article by Ian Merwin about cider fruit and he said it's not a good performer for him. It appears that some people have the golden KB touch/site while others do not (that's me).

I've also heard a story about a time when a bus load of UK growers visited Steve Wood's orchard and saw how productive his KB were. They cursed and were repulsed by how he was getting better yields than they ever could.

I say plant the seeds!

-Eliza

Edited 1 time(s). Last edit at 05/17/2015 12:02AM by Eliza Greenman.

[Reply Quote](#)

[Paul Weir](#)

[Re: Disease observations on cider varieties](#)

June 30, 2015 03:34AM

Moderator

Registered: 11 years ago

Posts: 187

I have a couple KB trees, all are about 6-7 years old, and this looked to finally be a good fruit set year, we had a lovely bloom this Spring and plenty of pollinators enjoying them and then Fire Blight struck and I found myself clipping off more infected KB fruit spurs than you can shake a stick at. I have not had any trouble with the 'black rots' that Cameron mentioned, but the fruit set up to this point has been light. My KB trees require more branch training than most. My trees are young and I have not given up hope that they may find my settings desirable . . . That said, I like Claude's advice of planting out the seeds. 1 in 10 is great odds compared to what has been traditionally looked at for 'finding' a new market variety. Channel our great great grandparents and see how they might have cherished a good 'spitter' or two for making their very own home grown elixir of life; right there on the farm.

Funny side note . . . Last year, I had one of my KB trees set about 20lbs of fruit. I had left a good many of them on the tree and they were forgotten for a time and accidentally became 'late harvest', in their profile - just on the edge of being too soft. The funny part was when a friend brought his Permaculture class by to visit, I talked up the 'pucker' factor and 'taking the enamel off your teeth', as we walked by that particular KB - the fruit had colored up great and I offered up some of the apples to any takers . . . but damn if those apples hadn't sweetened up to the point that everyone who tried one ate it to the core. . . then one of the student's asks "so, when does the pucker part begin?"

High fives Eliza . . . Plant the seeds indeed!

[Gopher Hill Apples](#)

Zone 8 in California

[Reply Quote](#)

[Karen Brindle](#)

[Re: Disease observations on cider varieties](#)

June 28, 2016 04:24AM

Registered: 9 years ago

Posts: 103

Hi Cameron (nice to see you here!) any update on what pathogen was infecting your Kingstons? I have to say that being just a few mile from you, but at a higher elevation, our 8 Kingston trees show zero disease. I hope you were able to get that problem solved for your young trees!

[Vista Ridge Orchard](#)

Zone 8a in Washington

235 Cider and heritage apple trees, 72 varieties,

[Reply Quote](#)

[Leslie Price](#)

[Re: Disease observations on cider varieties](#)

May 13, 2020 08:11AM

Registered: 5 years ago

Posts: 20

Cameron Denning Wrote:

> Great advice Claude! I would much rather have a
> unknown gem that requires little maintenance than
> the fussy KB. However, i am not ready to remove

- > the trees from the orchard. I still would like
- > to know what conditions are most favorable for the
- > variety, or any special nutrients that have helped
- > boost their immune response. Surely they have not
- > made it this far through history being so
- > finnick. I think i will start a new thread on
- > Kingston Blacks specifically to hopefully draw
- > some information from those like Steve Woods at
- > Poverty Lane, who seem to have sucess growing it.

Cameron, I just saw this thread. I hope you got your Kingstons working right by now. I have quite a bit of experience with them both here on my farm and earlier in my life at WSU Mt Vernon Research. In fact the 2 largest and oldest trees of KB in my orchard were taken from the research station when Gary Moulton had me remove the small block of cider trees that was there when I started in the mid 1990's.

Some of them were mixed up and not properly replicated. Gary was wanting to start our first of many official cider variety trials.

One of the things I have noticed about KB is that its a little on the weak side. Really not suitable, in most cases, for M9 size stocks. Its similar in growth habit, but less, to Boskoop. Short, thick, internodes that on a big enough rootstock will put out a lot of growth but on too small of rootstock it just looks like a 100 year old gnarled bonsai.

I have had great luck with the variety. Easy to get started. Easy to get into production. Great varietal or blender. Only complaint is the same as with a lot of over producing cider varieties, alternate bearing. Ive spent many years on organic blossom thinning techniques.

I actually bench grafted more this spring to double my production. Its very popular with the local cider makers.

Leslie Price
Jones Creek Farms
Lyman, WA
zone 8a
skagitvalleyfruit.com

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