



Wild Apples for Cider

Posted by [Ethan Gouge](#)

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[Ethan Gouge](#)

[Wild Apples for Cider](#)

March 07, 2016 05:27AM

Registered: 9 years ago

Posts: 36

The basic question is: If one comes across a wild apple that tastes bland could it definitively be said that this apple wouldn't make much of a contribution to cider? I've heard it said that most good cider apples are 'spitters' which I take to mean there is an overabundance or an imbalance of flavor; i.e. too much sugar, tannins, or acid. I would then assume that if a wild apple tastes bland, then it doesn't have much flavor period and can't make much of a contribution to a cider blend other than mere juice volume. Cider experts, am I missing something? I have many nice looking wild trees around the old farmstead that I would hate to cut down if they could prove useful.

Roan Highlands Farm 6b, Roan Mountain, TN elevation: 3200 ft.

Edited 1 time(s). Last edit at 03/07/2016 05:30AM by Ethan Gouge.

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[Claude Jolicoeur](#)

[Re: Wild Apples for Cider](#)

March 07, 2016 10:57PM

Registered: 11 years ago

Posts: 226

I would have to entirely disagree with you there...

Some of the best sweet or mild bittersweet cider apples are quite bland to taste.

Blandness is the opposite of freshness. A bland apple is an apple with little acidity - it may have a lot of sugar and nice flavor and still be bland upon tasting.

And at the opposite, a wild apple that tastes fresh has a good acidity - but this acidity is balanced by the sugar. Once fermented, the sugar won't be there to balance the acids anymore, and your cider will be too sharp.

The worst spitters, are those that have too much tannin. These may be good for cider, but in reasonable quantity in the blend.

So, in my opinion, a bland apple that has good perfume can be a great cider apple. But, you need more evaluation than just that. Ideally, you should make some juice and measure SG and acidity for a few years before being able to forge an opinion. Also taste the juice : do you feel some astringency (dryness on the palate) or some bitterness in the aftertaste? These are signs of tannin content - i.e. good for cider! Remember also that apples with little acidity are valuable for cider because we have a lot of varieties that have plenty of acid. Hence those are important for reducing the acidity of the blend for better balance.

And finally the best test is to make a small batch of cider. You say you have the trees in your backyard - what are you waiting for for making a batch of cider from them?

Claude

[Jolicoeur Orchard](#)

Zone 4 in Quebec

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

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

[Michael Phillips](#)

[Re: Wild Apples for Cider](#)

March 09, 2016 05:41PM

Moderator

Registered: 11 years ago

Posts: 621

Knowing a winner on the wild juice front takes all that Claude talks about. Yet its fun to start with the taste taste and try to peg the apple. Many spitters are bittersharp ... but how does one draw the line concerning too much tannin? It's rarer to find a bittersweet (in my opinion) that emulates what I taste in Dabinett. There's one apple in our upper field I'm calling the **Highlander Cider Apple** but only because I've used it for years to deepen flavor overtones in fresh juice (sweet cider). I've never fermented it straight up which apparently is the way to really know things. Still it's fun to reach the point where you have a name for your wildlings.

Here's an interesting "new kid on the block" tale. Bill Mayo over in Franklin, Vermont, planted a Honeycrisp orchard to primarily sell the fruit in his general store. He's gotten quite into apples since ... including promotion of a backyard tree now dubbed the **Franklin Cider**

Apple. But he is leagues out in front of the rest of us in that Stark and Adams County and I believe Cummins Nursery are all propagating the Franklin for release in the next year. Here's the info I have on file:

Quote

Bill Mayo

There is a new and exciting Bittersharp on (in) the block. About a year ago I discovered on our 250 acre property a bittersharp apple that is like no bittersharp found in North America. It has been tested by Steve Cummins from Geneva, NY. He has offered to Patent it as the first varieties ever named by his Nursery. Shawn Bixby from Starkbro Nursery has too offered to have it patented. Today we are meeting with Dan Rowell CEO/President of Vermont Cider Company who is "very interested and wants to discuss opportunities. The parent apple tree is over 80 years old, very healthy and produces a heavy crop annually. The tree is cold hardy down to -34F. The sugar content has a brix of 19.5 with low acid 3.0. Tannins are out of orbit with the most wonderful astringency imaginable. It has been tested by other Cideries and called not only unique but the best they have tested. Apples are scab resistant. Apples hang well after ripening. Snowball blooms, same time as Honeycrisp (great Pollinator). Apple size 1.75 inches. Tree growth is open and spreading.

Not that I go for the patenting bs in the case of a "found tree" ... but there's a jackpot to be thinking about next time you go feral!

[Lost Nation Orchard](#)

Zone 4b in New Hampshire

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[Claude Jolicoeur](#)

[Re: Wild Apples for Cider](#)

March 09, 2016 07:37PM

Michael Phillips Wrote:

Registered: 11 years ago

Posts: 226

> but how does one draw the line concerning too much tannin?

I don't think too much tannin is a problem by itself - for example, my Banane amère does have too much tannin, and one would be foolish to try and make a single variety cider with it. It would be undrinkable. But used in small percentage in a blend, it may bring very valuable notes. A variety like this should be used like a spice in cooking...

> It's rarer to find a bittersweet (in my opinion) that emulates what I taste in Dabinett.

Well, one can't expect (unless very very lucky) to find an apple of the quality of Dabinett or Yarlinton Mill in the first road-side ditch... But I am sure there are some out there waiting to be found! Myself, I am amazed by the number of wild bittersweet apples I find out there - maybe one seedling out of ten would qualify as bittersweet. Multiply this by the number of wild seedlings growing in North America and this makes a huge number of potentially interesting cider apples.

> I've never fermented it straight up which apparently is the way to really know things.

As mentioned above, fermenting as single variety is not necessarily the best way to go. In general it is better to make a blend with your potential candidate and some other apples so you get a balanced blend.

> Here's an interesting "new kid on the block" tale. Bill Mayo over in Franklin, Vermont [...]

> including promotion of a backyard tree now dubbed the **Franklin Cider Apple**. But he

> is leagues out in front of the rest of us in that Stark and Adams County and I believe Cummins

> Nursery are all propagating the Franklin for release in the next year.

Yes, Bill regularly sends me emails about his Franklin Apple - actually I got one yesterday...

For my part, I don't really like the way he does his thing, with patents and so on. (my way of doing things is to give away the varieties I discovered as I think they should be shared by all...) I never even dared to ask him to send wood as I figure he would ask that I sign all sort of non-propagation agreements...

Also, he does his evaluation of the variety from one tree growing in one location. As far as I know it has never been tested on orchard trees. Will it still be as productive and will it still give such high quality fruit when grown in another location and grafted on production trees? I think these questions should have been answered before the variety is released in any sort of large scale!

And finally, he wrote in his msg of yesterday:

Quote

Bill Mayo

A comprehensive analysis of raw components with particular focus on measuring Tannins/Phenols at University Test Labs were performed and was concluded the Franklin apple was better than Kingston Black in all categories (Sugar, Acid, Tannins) . The Kingston Black was said to be over-rated

One can't say an apple is better than Kingston Black just from lab measurements of sugar, acid and tannin! There is a lot more to it: flavor,

which isn't measurable. Also terroir - the KB used for comparison possibly wasn't of the highest quality the variety can give. The only statement I agree with is that KB is overrated... Yes, KB is a good cider apple, and it may be great on some terroirs, and it may be poor in other locations. There are a lot of other apples just as good, although lesser known.

Claude

[Jolicoeur Orchard](#)

Zone 4 in Quebec

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

Edited 1 time(s). Last edit at 05/17/2016 06:59AM by Claude Jolicoeur.

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