

Taste Test Apple Varieties

I have always enjoyed eating fresh apples from trees in my father's orchard, and I also recently became interested in several newer apple varieties I was unfamiliar with from local stores. After some thought on the subject, I decided to research these newer varieties and also apples in general. I first found some interesting trivia. The modern apple originated in central Asia and has probably been cultivated for over 6,500 years, making them the world's oldest cultivated fruit. Apples were brought to the United States in the mid 1600s in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. It is also interesting to note that the world's top producers of the fruit are China, the United States, Turkey, Iran and Italy in that order.

Another reason apples are so popular is that they are relatively easy to harvest, grow and ship. Under the correct conditions, they can also be stored by producers for several months, giving producers the ability to make apples available for several months. In fact, whether an apple can be easily stored for long periods of time highly influences if an apple will be commercially introduced. Finally, during the time period when apples from the United States are not available, they are easily imported from South America, Australia and New Zealand.

After performing this research, I wanted to determine if newer apple varieties have improved flavor over older ones. To do so, I had several local Master Gardeners taste test multiple older and newer varieties purchased from local vendors. Older varieties included Red Delicious, Golden Delicious, Fuji and Gala. Newer varieties were Sonya, Honey Crisp and Ambrosia. After sampling all apples, it was found that the older varieties were of poor quality as compared to the newer, and so a true taste test was not possible. The newer apple varieties were very crisp and sweet. Ambrosia was the sweetest being followed by Sonya and Honey Crisp. Prices for newer varieties varied from \$2 to \$3 per pound. Older apples cost between \$1 and \$2 a pound. I am reasonably certain that all of the older varieties being of poor quality was a coincidence. My wife and I regularly purchase Fuji and Gala apples, and they are generally crisp and well flavored.

Other apple varieties locally available that are becoming more popular include Pink Lady (Cripps Pink), Cameo and Pacific Rose. Pink Lady was developed in New Zealand and is great eaten fresh, in salads and as applesauce. Cameo, originally found in Washington State, is also amenable to eating, cooking and salads, and Pacific Rose can be stored for long periods of time.

If you are further interested in apples, there are several great resources online. An excellent site for comprehensive variety information is www.orangeippin.com. Comprehensive information on varieties favored by Washington growers can be found at <http://www.bestapples.com/varieties/index.shtml>. This site not only gives information on the background of the apple varieties but also details specific uses such as cooking, juicing and freezing. Wikipedia also gives excellent information on the general history of the apple: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apple>.

If you want to try something different, taste testing apples is relatively inexpensive and fun. It could make a great family activity. No matter what, eat an apple, enjoy its great flavor and have a great day.