

From Aunt Olivia's Kitchen

Apple Season

by Lydia Lovell



It's apple season, and this year's crop is the best in years. That fact should make apple-eating appealing to all. Nature-lovers thrill to the challenge of exploring country roads to find a good orchard with a pick-your-own policy where they can combine exercise with atavism, but your supermarket's produce counter offers the widest choice. Among eating-apples, red and golden delicious are excellent, and Granny Smith's only look as though they'll give you the mullygrubs; actually, they are sweet and fine. Romes and Cortlands, of course, are best used in baking.

Most modern orchardists employ insecticides to produce the perfect apples they send to market, but apples that grew on trees alongside Uncle Henry's barn were apt to be wormy. Nobody set out, purposely, to eat worms, of course, but Aunt Olivia wasn't one to let good food go to waste so it wouldn't surprise me if we got a little extra protein in our diets from livestock in home-grown apples. Dealing with worms was a matter of proper preparation. Before cooking, each apple was quartered, cored, and dewormed. By the time I was eight years old, I had become an expert in the use of a paring knife. With a minimum of supervision I could prepare apples for a number of different dishes.

For Aunt Olivia's **Apple Butter**, she and I would wash, quarter, core, and cut into small pieces enough apples to make about four quarts. To be honest, an occasional worm may have escaped our notice, but that had no appreciable effect on the final product. The apples were placed in a large pot, covered with a couple of quarts of water, and boiled until soft. Then we pressed them through a sieve to remove the skins. Meanwhile, about six cups of apple cider were heating on the stove, and to this we added the apple pulp, a teaspoon each of ground cinnamon, ground allspice, and ground cloves, and a pound-and-a-half of sugar. Stirring with a big wooden spoon to prevent scorching, we cooked the mixture until it was thick enough to spread, then poured the apple butter into four sterilized pint jars and sealed them.

Another recipe calling for apples used up plenty of green tomatoes in the bargain. One branch of the Lovell family had moved across the Sound to Edgartown on Martha's Vineyard, and that's where this recipe originated. Not only is the result super-delicious, but it keeps well. From one batch, a single jar managed to escape notice for three years! It proved as good, when we finally discovered and opened it, as the day it was made. Maybe better. **Patty's Green Tomato Chutney** strengthened those family ties.

- 10 C. chopped green tomatoes
- 1 T. salt
- 4 C. chopped unpeeled apples
- 2 large chopped onions
- 2 to 4 cups cider vinegar
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 2 lbs. dark brown sugar
- 1/2 t. pepper

A certain amount of common sense should be used when making chutney. For instance, if the tomatoes and apples are very juicy, two cups of vinegar may be enough. When adding vinegar to the apples and tomatoes, use two cups. Then stir in the sugar and see if more liquid will be needed to dissolve the sugar. If needed, add more vinegar and stir in the other ingredients. Heat slowly until sugar is dissolved. Simmer until mixture is thick and clear. Pour into glass jars and seal at

once. Ten large green tomatoes and six large apples should yield about four cups.

Always a welcome accompaniment to pork or chicken are **Apple Fritters**; Aunt Olivia had several recipes, but two were favorites. To serve as a relish with a meal, she made them as follows:

- 1 C. sifted flour
- 3 T. confectioners sugar
- 1-1/2 t. baking powder
- 1/4 t. salt

- 1/2 C. milk
- 1 well-beaten egg
- 2 med. tart apples, unpeeled, and thin sliced

Sift dry ingredients into a bowl. Beat egg, add milk, stir into dry ingredients and mix well. Stir in apples. Heat fat in electric skillet to 365°. Drop spoonfuls of batter into hot fat, fry two minutes until golden, flip with tongs, and fry other side one to two minutes. Drain on a brown paper bag. Yield: 1-1/2 dozen.

The other recipe bears a similar name but produces a fritter better suited to serving for dessert, and best eaten warm and sprinkled with powdered sugar and cinnamon. To differentiate between the two, Aunt Olivia called this recipe **Sweet Apple Fritters**.

- 8 to 10 large apples
- 1/2 C. sugar
- 1/2 C. brandy
- 1/2 t. cinnamon
- 2 eggs, separated
- 1/2 C. milk

- 1 T. butter, melted
- 1 C. flour
- 1/4 t. salt
- 1 T. sugar
- Vegetable oil for frying

Prepare batter by beating together egg yolks, milk, and melted butter. Add flour, salt, and a T. sugar. Let stand two hours at room temperature. Peel apples and use apple corer, keeping apples whole until you slice them into 1/2" rings. In a large bowl, combine sugar, brandy, and cinnamon. Add apple rings and stir gently. Refrigerate in marinade for at least an hour. Heat an inch of oil in an electric skillet to 375°. Beat egg whites until stiff and fold into batter. Using tongs, lift apple rings from marinade one at a time. Dip into batter and fry until golden, turning to brown both sides. Drain on absorbent paper. Sprinkle with confectioners sugar and serve hot. On very special occasions, Uncle Henry substituted kirsch for the final sprinkle of confectioners sugar. Scrumptious.

Apple season would have been incomplete had Aunt Olivia neglected to make an **Apple Tart** since it was my mother's favorite treat.

- Pastry: 1-1/2 C. flour
- 1/2 t. salt

- 1/2 C. (1/4 lb.) margarine
- 2-1/2 T. cold water

In a small bowl, cut shortening into flour and salt un mixture resembles coarse meal. Sprinkle with cold water, little at a time, while tossing with a fork. Use only enough water to hold pastry together. Roll out on a floured board a line bottom and sides of an 8" baking dish, being careful not to stretch pastry.

- Filling: 1 T. flour
- 1 C. sugar (divided)
- 5 medium apples
- 1/4 t. ground nutmeg
- 2 T. butter

Combine flour and sugar and sprinkle over bottom of pastry-lined baking dish. Quarter, core, and pare apples. Place apples, cut side down, on top of pastry. Sprinkle with mixture of 3/4 C. sugar and nutmeg. Dot with butter. Bake at 350° about an hour until apples are fork-tender and a rich syrup forms. Serve with whipped cream, vanilla ice cream, or with a generous cube of sharp cheese.

While Uncle Henry enjoyed **Apple Tart** nearly as much as my mother did, he used to declare that his first preference when it came to apple desserts was a pot pie. This recipe, according to Aunt Olivia's not written in her own hand on the reverse side of the yellowed 3x5 card, was given her by a German lady who came to Cape Cod prior to the time the United States entered the first World War in 1917. I remember hearing stories about Gretty and how sad she felt to think that young men of two wonderful countries were fighting with one another on the battlefields of Europe. This was Gretty's recipe for **Apple Pot Pie**:

- Pastry: 3 C. sifted flour
- 3/4 t. salt
- 1/4 C. shortening
- 8 T. cold water

Sift flour and salt into bowl, add shortening, and cut into flour until mixture is like a coarse meal. Gradually add cold water, tossing with fork and using only enough water to hold pastry together. Divide pastry in half, roll to 1/8" thickness on floured board, and cut into 2" squares. Repeat with rest of pastry.

- Filling: 6 large apples (2 lbs.)
- 3/4 C. sugar
- 1 t. ground cinnamon
- 1/4 C. butter
- 1 C. boiling water

Wash apples, pare, core, and cut into eighths. Cover bottom of a heavy, deep saucepan with a layer of apples, sprinkle generously with sugar and cinnamon mixture, and top with a layer of pastry squares. Repeat layering until all are used, ending with pastry squares. Dot top with butter. Pour boiling water over all, cover tightly, and bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce heat to low and continue cooking about 25 minutes. Serve warm with cream.

Nothing is more American, we've been told, than apple pie, but no good cook need limit herself (or himself) strictly to the traditional apple pie. These are but a sampling of apple recipes among Aunt Olivia's collection, but they are all we have space for today. More, another time.