

VILLAGE VIEW

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Apples? You're looking for a farm where you can buy apples? You want to pick your own? From the trees? You want to fill a couple of bushel baskets with apples, bring them home and store them for use through the coming winter?

That's a neat idea, but Cape Cod no longer offers apple orchards. To locate a farm with an apple orchard, you'll need to put some mileage, expensive mileage, on the family car; but if you're headed for the hills anyway, bringing back fruits and vegetables from the farms can help pay for the trip. Just be sure you've a suitable place to store them, or you won't save much.

Not many years ago there were farms nearby where you could buy all the apples you could carry home, but land hereabouts is too valuable today to warrant using acreage for orchards, and fruit trees require a lot of attention if they're to produce marketable fruit. You can't just toss a couple of apple seeds in the ground and expect to start picking your own in a few years.

You can't even set out seedling trees and hope to reap a harvest soon unless you're prepared to put a good deal of work into your orchard. There's more to growing fruit successfully than meets the casual eye.

In the spring before the trees blossom, they must be fertilized; throughout the growing season the orchard needs mowing to keep it free of weeds and wild plants that seed in wherever there's good soil and space to grow. Trees must be irrigated in dry spells and pruned to keep them healthy. Only the best fruit should be allowed to mature.

When the trees bloom, the farmer who wants a good crop will spray with blossom set. Throughout the summer as the tiny apples swell, the orchard attracts millions of creatures bent on their own survival at the expense of the crop. There are aphids and caterpillars, beetles and worms. There are molds and scale, leaf hoppers and flies. Doing battle with these, the farmer sprays and dusts. It's chemical warfare.

Does it work? The heaps of perfect fruit in our supermarkets prove it does. When was the last time you bit into an apple and found a worm? If that happened recently, you've probably spent time on a farm. Orchardists send only perfect fruit to market.

What did folks do before all those chemicals were invented? How did farmers protect their crops before there were sprays and dusts to combat bugs and diseases? Fact is, they didn't.

And people ate apples in those days, just as they do today. But they were on the lookout for worms. They expected apples to be slightly misshapen. They thought nothing of it if the skin was blemished or the core tunneled with evidence of animal life invasion. That's how apples were; that's how everything was; nothing was perfect in life. Nobody expected perfection in this world, only in Heaven.

In days before chemicals became a major tool of the farmer, people pulled ripe apples from trees and ate them without washing them. There was no film of poison spray on the surface to kill the bugs; if there was a bad spot in the fruit, or a worm, it was spit out and the rest consumed with gusto.

People pared apples and cored them, cutting away any parts that weren't good. They made applesauce, apple butter, and pressed huge quantities of the crop for cider. Apples were fried, baked in pies, sliced thin and dried, and preserved in spicy syrup. Apples went into pudding, stuffing, salad, bread, cake, dumplings, fritters, jelly, mincemeat and wine. Billions of apples, every year, ended up as vinegar, and still do today.

Apples used for vinegar, however, don't sell for fifty or sixty cents a pound at the grocery store. Neither will you pay that much for the ones you pick yourself from a commercial orchard.

Within a hundred miles from Cape Cod there are many apple orchards to be found; some of these encourage people to come out under the trees and pick the fruit. Ladders and baskets are supplied, but the apples will be transferred to paper bags at the farm store, so you may wish to bring your own cartons.

Most commercial orchards grow several kinds of apples; in addition to some of the newer varieties, you'll find the old favorites, Red and Yellow Delicious, Baldwins, Greenings, Cortlands and McIntosh. You'll also find picking apples from

the tree is quite different from choosing them from a pyramid at the market.

To reach the best ones you'll need the ladder; you won't be encouraged to climb the tree. The farmer doesn't want to be sued if you fall and break a leg, nor does he want his branches broken. Someone will be in the orchard directing your activities.

The place to start is inside, near the main trunk. Getting there with a ladder can be a bit tricky since the fruit on the tree is heavy and weighs the branches down; still, that's the best approach. Once inside, you can look up and see all the apples suspended from their tough little stems, hanging just out of reach.

The most beautiful apple of all always grows on the tip-top of the highest branch. There it's had full advantage of the warm sun's rays and is perfectly developed. You can be positive it will be the sweetest, juiciest, most delicious apple of them all. You can be just as positive you won't be able to manipulate the ladder to a position where you can pick that particular apple. Nor will it fall if you shake the tree.

You'll leave it there when you carry your harvest back to settle up at the farm store. The memory of it will haunt you for months.

You still want to pick apples? The apple belt in Massachusetts is located conveniently on both sides of Route 495, approximately twenty miles due west of Boston. It runs south into Rhode Island and north to New Hampshire. Most pick-your-own farms are to be found within a ten-mile radius of the intersection of the Mass. Pike and Route 495.

At Ayer, Nashoba Valley Orchards are on Rte. 110 off Rte. 2. At Bolton, Bolton Springs Farm is on Rte. 117, two miles east of 495. Red Pine Acres, 89 High Street in Chelmsford invites you to pick. In Harvard, there are two orchards: William Doe, Westcott Road, and Carlson Orchards, Oak Hill Road.

Over in Littleton, there's an orchard on Nagog Hill Road, off Rte 2-A. Barnes Orchards on Stow Road, off Route 20, in Marlboro, is in the same neighborhood. Peabody's Brooksby Farm is on Felton Street.

If you get as far as Stow, there are three orchards to choose from: Carver Hill on Rte. 62 off Rte. 117, Honey-Pot Hill at 144 Sudbury Road, and Shelburne Farm, 106 West Acton Road.

At Westboro, you'll find the Zane Arnold Orchards on Spring Road. All permit customers to pick their own fruit, but the one I know most about is Honey-Pot Hill Orchard at Stow. Fifty of this farm's 150 acres is orchard, and over twenty varieties of apples are grown here, along with several varieties of peaches, pears and quince.

You'll find newer varieties such as Spartan, Empire, Spencer and Macoun. If you're unfamiliar with these apples, you've a taste treat in store as well as a pleasant drive and some good outdoor exercise.

Store apples where its damp and cold, but not freezing. If you don't happen to have a root cellar on your place, you might kill two birds with one stone by installing a door at the foot of your basement bulkhead to help cut down your heat bill this winter, and keep your apples on the cold side of the door, as low as possible. On very cold night, throw an old rug over your apple barrel to protect the fruit.

Now you're all set to enjoy apples as long as your supply holds out; even the ones in which you find a worm.