

*Malus*

*Rosaceae*

*Malus* is derived from Greek *melos* (apple) and is a classical Latin name for the tree.

Archaeologists have found Stone Age remains in central Europe that show that apples provided a food long before recorded history. For instance the imprint of a seed has been found in a fossil from an English Neolithic site (new Stone Age about 2700-1900 BC). Despite such findings however its true origins are still unknown. It is thought by some authorities that it may be a native of south-western Asia (in the region around the Black and Caspian seas), although others say that the apple had been introduced there from central Asia. In any event they were a familiar fruit in some form to the Arabs in the Near East, and to the ancient Greeks and the Romans. The apple tree was certainly being cultivated in the Nile Valley during the reign of Rameses III (1198-1167). The Greeks must have been cultivating apple by the 7<sup>th</sup> Century BC as records show that Solon (640 or 638-559 BC), who had been appointed to reform the constitution, was so horrified by the profligacy displayed at Athenian wedding ceremonies at that time that he decreed that each couple was only allowed one apple between them before they retired for the night. By the time that the famous Roman, Pliny the Elder (23-79) was writing on natural history he was able to record 36 different kinds of apple that were being cultivated by his countrymen.

Although the Romans are held to be responsible for introducing some of these to various parts of their Empire the honours for orchard husbandry must, according to most authorities, be placed at the feet of the Etruscans who had colonized central Italy around 750 BC. One such apple developed by the Etruscans was called the *Api* and this has lasted through to the present day. It was one of seven kinds served to the Sun King, Louis XIV (1638-1715) and in France is still known as *pomme d'Api*. In the United States it is called *Lady Apple*. For Americans it was once treated as a Christmas delicacy – and though rare can still be hunted down today. In due time Christian monasteries were then destined to pick up the mantle of development of these fruit as witnessed in their many orchards scattered throughout Western Europe. North America was introduced to the European apple stock in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> Century by early settlers and shortly after this the European apples also arrived in South Africa and Australia.

When the settlers first arrived in North America each immigrant nationality contributed to the establishment of the young countries' traditional foods – and the English took apples and made apple pie. Different kinds of apple tree were indigenous and familiar to North American Indian tribes. The Hopi, Oweekeno, Haisla, Iroquois and Hanaksiala ate these apples raw – but records suggest that the Iroquois tended to mash them either for a sauce or to be formed into little cakes that were dried for future use.

The Mohican tribe used forked sticks from the apple tree like divining rods to find water. While the Navajo Indians obtained an orange dye from the tree's bark.

The apple tree offered a source of medicine for a few Indian tribes. While the Iroquois applied a bark and fruit peel poultice to bruises and also used the bark for easing earache or soothing black eyes, the Cherokee Indians took an inner bark decoction to ease hoarseness.

Although apple trees had long been familiar in the wild on the North American Continent when the early settlers arrived, cultivation of the trees in orchards was not. Once apple orchards

were established in the New World cider and apple jack became popular. The settlers who crossed the Atlantic on the Mayflower from England and made landfall on the Massachusetts coast in November 1620 helped the first British Governor to plant an orchard at Boston. The French established orchards in Canada shortly after, and the Dutch director of the New Netherland colony, Peter Stuyvesant (1592-1672), planted an orchard at New Amsterdam (subsequently New York) on land wrested from the Indians – an area that is now bounded by 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenues and East 15<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> streets. Here in 1647 he claimed that, with native American trees the authorities assume, he produced the first fully American apple tree. This is said to have survived until 1866 when it was destroyed by a derailed railway carriage.

About 150 years later North American apple orchards received another boost. Johnny Appleseed popped up. He was christened John Chapman (1774-1845) and around 1800 he began planting apple seedlings (not the apple seeds collected from the cider presses which paint the romantic legend) in the Ohio River Valley. The story tells how a ragged figure was always one step ahead of the frontiersmen and although today authorities doubt the veracity of the many tales of his selfless generosity he is still credited with stocking the apple orchards of all the pioneer communities then springing up in Ohio, Illinois and Indiana – a very large area. Apparently his favourite apple was called the ‘Rambo’ that can still be found today. [He is also believed to have planted various herbs used for healing at that time including pennyroyal (this may have been the indigenous plant American pennyroyal, *Hedeoma pulegioides*, or the pennyroyal brought with them from Europe by the settlers, *Mentha pulegium*) and horehound (which may too have been American horehound, *Lycopus americanus*, or from Europe, white horehound, *Marrubium vulgare*, which is happy in Mediterranean climates and was certainly familiar to many North American Indian tribes or black horehound from the cooler temperate areas of Europe, *Ballota nigra*.)] Authorities point out that the cultivated apple did not reach the Pacific Northwest until the mid-1820s and only began to be grown there on a commercial scale after a further twenty odd years. Then in the early 1850s the apple received a further boost on the western side of that Continent in parallel with the orange (*Citrus sinensis*) as the prospectors made a headlong dash during the California Gold Rush. Records show that in 1852 one shipment of four bushels of Washington apples fetched a remarkable \$500.

For the Romans apples were eaten as a vegetable and this use, even in soup, persisted in Europe into the Middle Ages. In northern Europe up to the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century Scandinavians were dependent upon dried apple as one of the important constituents of their Winter diet. In contrast today the apple is thought of primarily as a ‘sweet’ food although its use in savoury dishes does continue but invariably as an unsweetened sauce or other accompaniment.

Apart from food, apples also provided cider as already mentioned. Although bearing no resemblance to that known today a form of cider was familiar to both the ancient Greeks and the Romans. Apples were also familiar at that time in north-western Spain and Portugal and it is believed that it was the Basque fishermen and sailors who spread the drink (cider) in Europe by introducing it further up the coast to French Normandy in the 6<sup>th</sup> Century AD. It swept through the province and became the staple tippie there. Thus when William the Conqueror (1027-1087) invaded England in 1066 it was natural for him to include casks of cider in his baggage. In England at that time ale was the main drink but cider soon began to rival it as a close second. Today France leads the world in the art of cider-making. While in Britain where the industry is much smaller than that of its French neighbour attempts are being made to revive apple wassailing as part of efforts to increase the drink’s popularity in that Country again. Wassailing was an old fertility

ritual that began in pagan times and involved the consumption of large quantities of cider on Twelfth Night.

Apple features in myths and legends. There are many Greek myths in which the apple plays a prominent role. The destruction of Troy was supposed to have occurred after a chain of events that began when the golden Apple of Discord was thrown down before the assembled gods by Eris, the goddess of hate (although it may well have been an orange or a lemon). One of the twelve labours of Heracles involved obtaining the golden apples of the Gardens of the Hesperides (the Canary Islands), and three golden apples which Hippomenes tossed over his shoulder as he ran lured Atalanta into stopping to pick them up, thus enabling him to win their race – and, with this victory her hand. It is said that St. Dorothy who was executed in about 313 was taunted as she went to her death by a young lawyer, Theophilus who suggested she send him fruit from the Garden of Paradise. The story claims that she prayed for this before she died and an angel took three apples and three roses to Theophilus who not only became a Christian but was then martyred as well during the spate of Christian persecution instigated by the Roman Emperor Diocletian (245-313). Since that time apples or a basket of apples and roses has become a symbol of St. Dorothy. An English legend which allows for much artistic licence and tells how Joseph of Arimathea spat apple pips from a fruit he was eating into the valleys below as he stood on Glastonbury Tor. These developed into the orchards of Herefordshire, Somerset and Devonshire. Not least of other English legends is the popular tradition that the apple was the devil's lure from the tree of knowledge in the Garden of Eden (even though it is not specifically named as such in the *Bible*). In Arthurian legend King Arthur awaits passage to the Other World in the Isle of Avalon's Elysian fields and the Celtic name for Avalon means 'apple orchard'. More recent Western folk tales also place the apple in a significant role. The stories of *William Tell*, of *Snow White* and probably the most modern that of the *Wizard of Oz* (in which the Wicked Witch tries to tempt the heroine with a rosy apple).

One factual English story about the apple not yet mentioned is that which it is said Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727) himself related. He was born in Woolsthorpe in Lincolnshire and in 1666 he happened to see an apple fall from one of the orchard trees – an event that set a train of thought in motion that ultimately enabled him to propose the theory of gravitation. Apparently the tree in question (the kind of apple, which was of course irrelevant, was always unknown) received much veneration from devotees until it finally collapsed.

Many references can also be found in literature – but the older ones, including those in the English Bible, are not always what they seem as 'apple' can stand for other fruit such as the citron (*Citrus medica*), quince (*Cydonia oblonga*) or orange (*Citrus sinensis*). There are other anomalies as well. For example at one time 'pippin' was one of the general names for 'apple' and as today we refer to a favourite variety eg. Cox's, so older references may also be made to say Bitter-swete or Apple-john. Among the references made by the famous English dramatist, William Shakespeare (1564-1616) can be found this in Part 1 of *Henry IV* in which Falstaff declares

..... do I not dwindle? Why, my skin hangs about me like an old lady's loose gown: I am wither'd like an old apple-John. ....

While in Part 2 of *Henry IV* Justice Shallow says

Nay, you shall see mine orchard, where, in an arbour, we will eat a last year's pippin of my own grafting, with a dish of caraways, and so forth; -.....

Then in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*

..... I pray you be gone. I will make an end of my dinner:  
there's pippins and cheese to come.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> Century the English poet, William Wordsworth (1770-1850) wrote in his famous poem entitled *Ode to Autumn*.

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness!  
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;  
Conspiring with him how to load and bless  
With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eaves run;  
To bend with apples the moss'd cottage-trees,  
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core; .....

Nearer to the present day the 19<sup>th</sup> Century American Congregationalist clergyman and writer, Henry Ward Beecher (1813-1887) who was also the brother of Harriet Beecher Stowe declared

What if you have seen it before, ten thousand times over? An apple tree in full blossom is like a message, sent fresh from heaven to earth, of purity and beauty!

The fruit and blossom especially have attracted the attention of many artists. The Dutch painter Charley Toorop (1891-1955), probably better known for her over life-size, sombre-eyed portraits, also painted fruit trees. Critics suggest that she was especially fascinated by the gnarled trunks of the older trees which is well supported in her *An old apple tree in blossom*.

Many old customs and sayings in English and European lore have relied upon the apple some of which continue today.

An apple a day keeps the doctor away  
that is said to be derived from one recorded in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century that ran  
Eat an apple on going to bed.  
And you'll keep the doctor from earning his bread.

is nowadays not thought to be as foolproof as believed even twenty or thirty years ago.  
Then there is

The apple never falls far from the tree  
which alludes to the persistence of family characteristics. And last but not least  
One bad apple can spoil the whole barrel.

Older medically associated superstitions include the belief that a large apple eaten on Hallowe'en will give protection from colds for a year. Warts could be cured with a cut apple. After rubbing the wart with the apple and burying the fruit in the garden, the wart would disappear as the apple rotted. Red noses acquired from drink could be restored to their former appearance if the juice was applied to the skin. Apples were also an ingredient in other beauty preparations, and the word pomade ie. a hair ointment, can be traced back to the French word for apple, *pomme*.

In England at least the night of 31<sup>st</sup> October used to host a game that was supposed to divine marriage stakes. Apples were secured with pieces of string and each person whirled the strung fruit around in front of the fire. Marriage was indicated for the participant whose apple fell first, and the single state for life for the holder of the apple that lasted the longest. Today many people will try and peel an apple to obtain one long strip of rind. In the past this was part of a ritual in which the whole peeled rind would be thrown over the left shoulder and the initials it formed when it fell on the ground would be those of the future spouse. Apple rind was a feature of many other practices for ascertaining future marriage partners as were apple pips and stalks. A very old custom that was supposed to ensure a good apple crop and used to take place on New Year's Eve or Twelfth Night was in effect an excuse for a rumbustious party held in an apple orchard. (It was said that it was the remains of the pagan sacrifices that used to be made to Pomona, the Roman

goddess of fruit and fruit trees.) The ‘partygoers’ took kettles and pans, and guns and cider with them. An apple tree (not one that was giving a poor crop) was singled out and the assembled company would hail it with such words as

Here’s to thee old apple tree!

Whence thou may’s’t blow and whence thou may’s’t bear apples  
enow;

Hats full! Caps full!

Bushels, bushels, sacks full,

And my pockets full too!

Huzza! Huzza!

and drink a toast to it, after which cider was poured over its roots and a cider-sodden piece of toasted bread was secured to trunk or branch. Then the sleeping tree spirits were awakened and the demons driven out by a fusillade through the upper branches, supported by the remaining company who banged their various utensils accompanied by singing, shouting and dancing. Variations on this theme are to be found all over Europe and North America. The omens for a good crop were said to be positive if the sun shone through the apple trees on Christmas morning (some said Easter) and in addition would herald a prosperous year for the owner. Today still some people when harvesting will leave one apple on the tree for the birds. This translates from earlier times into leaving a gift for the fairies and spirits. In the past however the practice was also viewed as a death omen – as also for a member of the owner’s family if blossom appeared in the Autumn (particularly if both flowers and fruit were on the same branch) –

A bloom on the tree when the apples are ripe

Is a sure termination of somebody’s life.

While on the subject of death the Welsh used to put apple blossom on the coffin before it was covered with earth as this would restore youth beyond the grave. In less morbid vein one other practice common in various English counties in June or July was that of blessing or christening the new apple crop. In some localities it took place on St. Peter’s Day (29<sup>th</sup> June), in some St. Swithun’s Day (15<sup>th</sup> July) and in yet others St. James’ Day (25<sup>th</sup> July). As a result of a general increase in interest in local tradition and the environment attempts are being made now to revive some of these old practices (in addition to wassailing). In one of the Swiss cantons even in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, like the lime (or linden, *Tilia cordata*) tree in Germany an apple tree was planted at the birth of a boy (and a pear tree, *Pyrus*, for a baby girl) and its growth was believed to reflect that of the child.

It was only in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century that varieties of apple began to acquire long-standing names.

One of the oldest varieties of apple is said to be the *Court pendu plat* also known as the Wise apple. First known records of it are dated 1613 (a youngster compare with the Api mentioned above) but it is thought to have been introduced to Britain by the Romans. Some believe this variety is the ‘Forbidden Fruit’ referred to in Christian lore. Another which was known before 1650 on the North American Continent was familiar there as ‘Boston russet’.

The traditional pomander, which today is based on an orange (*Citrus sinensis*), is said originally to have been an apple stuck with cloves (*Syzygium aromaticum*). Another custom that dates back at least to the 16<sup>th</sup> Century is still maintained today in England. Some of the old London Livery Companies (and it is said Trinity College, Cambridge too) serve a dish of caraway seeds (*Carum carvi*) with roast apples. This practice is mentioned by William Shakespeare (c.1530-1601) the English playwright, poet and actor/manager, in *Henry IV* which was written between 1594 and 1598.

Apple wood, apart from today being an extravagant sweet-smelling fuel (which some have refused to burn even in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century as it is a very old symbol of plenty and such sacrilege could threaten a household's prosperity) has long been used for decorative carving, inlay work and veneering. This wood has been made into items ranging from machinery parts (including cog wheels), pianos and furniture to fruit presses, book binder screws, mallet heads, shuttles, tool handles, walking sticks, mathematical instruments, skittle balls and toys.

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century some authorities noted the future of several hundred English cider apple orchards in the West Country was threatened. Cider had lost much of its popularity and alternative uses for the excess apples needed to be found. A possibility under consideration was the conversion of the fruits' bioethanol into electricity which could be exported to the Country's national electricity grid.

Apple blossom, suspected to be from this species, was adopted as a state emblem for Arkansas in the United States in 1901. Certainly Michigan also claims this particular apple blossom for an emblem as from 1897.

Today the fruit are used widely on a commercial scale by the food industry in processing. and by the drinks industry as well, not only for apple juice but also spirits such as Calvados, or cider.