

Pioneer Apples of the San Bernardino Mountains

Compiled by Kevin Hauser, Kuffel Creek Apple Nursery

In October of 2006 my wife Marty and I set out to catalog the remaining apple trees growing in the San Bernardino mountains that were planted by pioneers between 1875 and 1925, ranging from the Cajon pass to Highway 38 (we excluded Oak Glen). From what we can tell there used to be over 100,000 trees, which has now dwindled down to about 1,000. Many are still bearing heavy crops of the same exact apples enjoyed by ranchers, miners, workers for the dams and roadways, and early resorts.

This list is a catalog of the varieties we were able to identify. You may discover that trying to ID an apple is often like trying to find the difference between twins. You may show the apple to three old-timers, and get three different answers, and have them admit the other two answers may be right also. The appearance of the apple can be influenced by the position on the tree, if it was shaded by leaves or not, the altitude it was grown, and the health or age of the tree. Even early on there were commercial "sports" (mutations) of some varieties that are more highly colored and thus more marketable, but also make them hard to identify.

We've taken cuttings from the best examples of these trees and grafted them onto rootstocks to form the **Historic Mountain Apple Orchard**. This collection is duplicated at several locations in different climates to assure the survival of this unique genetic material in case of disease or fire. You can order your own trees of these and 80 other varieties through Kuffel Creek Apple Nursery at www.kuffelcreek.com/apples.htm



Arkansas Black *Arkansas, 1870* Thought to be a Winesap seedling, Arkansas Black is a strikingly beautiful apple with a deep burgundy, approaching almost jet black skin. The flesh is yellow, crisp, juicy, and has a distinctive sweet wine flavor. Those grown in the mountains are hard as a rock when first picked and need to mellow in storage a month before you can sink your teeth into it, and thus make great keepers, storing fine in the crisper bin for months. They develop a very "greasy" skin in storage. However, those grown down in the hot inland valleys are wonderful to eat right off the tree, and are the best I've ever tasted. They ripen here around Thanksgiving. Impervious to heat, they are excellent to grow in Southern California, even the low deserts of Palm Springs and Las Vegas.



Baldwin *Massachusetts, 1740* Once the most widely commercially cultivated apple in the Northeast, until starting in 1918, several terrible winters wiped out millions of Baldwin trees. They were replaced with a Canadian upstart named *Macintosh*. Baldwin bears crops alternate years but is a heavy bearer. The skin is tough, yellow, and nearly covered and striped with red and crimson. The flesh is yellowish-white, firm, coarse, crisp, rather tender, juicy, and has a nice sweet-tart flavor of good quality. It ripens between September and November.



Ben Davis *Kentucky, 1799* A beautiful red-streaked apple that keeps like a cobblestone. Grows on a vigorous healthy tree and bears regularly and heavily. So what's the catch? While Red Delicious can occasionally be delightful to eat, no one (except fruit salesmen) had a kind thing to say about the flavor of Ben Davis. "Coarse", "dry", "tough" were usual terms. In fact, there was a raging controversy over the flavor, with one camp saying it tasted like cardboard, and the other camp saying "no, no, it tastes like a ball of cotton with a red skin". The flesh is white, bland, and dry. Ripens in October; can't be any worse down in the hot valleys as it is in colder climates. Often mistaken for a seedling apple.



Blacktwig *Arkansas, 1870* Also called Mammoth Blacktwig, it is indeed a very big red apple with high yields that's quite tart when picked. It has yellow flesh with yellow veins that's firm and juicy. It mellows out in storage to be sweeter and not as tart. Used for cooking and fresh-eating, ripens in October.



Blue Pearmain *New England, prior to 1845* We're going out on a limb on this one (get it? Going out on a limb? Apples/ limbs? That was a joke...), as we can only find one example in the mountains. The very tough skin is a beautiful yellow overlaid with red, scarlet, and purple, and has a thick "bloom" of bluish wax that polishes off. The decidedly hard flesh is yellow and of excellent taste, if you can stand chewing it as it is really tough. You're almost able to suck the wonderful juice out of the flesh. Ripens in October.



Calville Blanc D'Hiver *France, 1500's* Calville is easy to recognize; just think Klingon. It has humped shoulders, ribs running down the sides, and knobs on the bottom. Picked green for pies, yellow for fresh eating. It bruises easily, but has a smooth, tender flesh and exquisite flavor that does well in pies. More vitamin C than an orange; ripens in October.



Delicious (Hawkeye) *Iowa, 1881* Not to be confused with its unripe, watery, mealy and over-hybridized offshoot *Red Delicious*, *Delicious* (also known as *Standard Delicious* or *Old-Fashioned Delicious*) makes for very good, if not excellent, for fresh eating. Off your tree it is crisp, sweet, and flavorful. The skin will not develop the deep, hot-rod red color as in the supermarket, but you will not miss it a bit once you taste Delicious as it was meant to be. The tree is healthy and robust and ripens in October. Keeps fairly well in refrigeration. Self-fertile and is a good pollinator for other apples. Our variety is grafted from trees planted in 1912. Tested good in Southern California.



Esopus Spitzenburg *New York, late 1700's* Known as a favorite apple of Thomas Jefferson. It is a large apple, oblong in shape, smooth-skinned and colored a lively, brilliant red, approaching scarlet. In hot and humid regions, the color is not as pronounced. The yellow flesh is hard, rich, juicy, and sprightly, and in taste tests, it usually ranks very high. It ripens over a few weeks in late September and early October, and improves dramatically in storage. Tested good in Southern California and also did well in central Mexico.



Gloria Mundi *Maryland, 1780* - The key word here is big; big blossoms, big leaves, big fruit. A humongous apple, probably the largest apple ever grown in the United States, according to Lee Calhoun. Some apples commonly reach a pound or a pound-and-a-half. While not considered a good fresh-eating apple, it is a fine cooking variety. The fruit is large to very large and roundish in shape although the sides are often unequal. It has greenish-yellow skin with a faint, bronze blush. The greenish-yellow flesh is coarse, moderately crisp and quite acid, becoming mellow when fully ripe. Ripens late October.



Golden Delicious *Missouri, 1920's* Long-time favorite for its sweetness and flavor. Reliable producer, adapted to many climates. Good pollinator, as it blooms a long time. You may be shocked at the spiciness and crisp texture of a tree-ripened sample, as the apples off the tree are much, much better than those in the supermarket. Good for fresh-eating and pies. Ripens in September, Self-fertile. In hot climates it should be picked a little green, as it does not attain the quality as in a cooler climate. Tested OK for Southern California.



Gravenstein *Italy, 1600's* A big tree with big leaves, Gravenstein has been in California since 1820 and is almost considered an American apple. The skin is greenish-yellow with red stripes- pick a bit green for pies. The aromatic flesh is tender, fine-grained with a well-balanced sugar-acid content. The crunchy, juicy apples are best eaten right away, as they don't keep well. Easy to identify as it is the only apple to obtain excellent quality in late August to early September. The pollen is sterile, won't pollinate other apples or itself and needs a pollinator. Use when green for pies and yellow for fresh eating.



Grimes Golden *West Virginia, 1804* Believed to be one of the parents of Golden Delicious, Grimes Golden is a greenish-yellow apple that turns clear yellow with a pink blush in storage. It has an intense sweet flavor that keeps extremely well. Does well in a warm climate and is self-fertile and a good pollinator. Our scionwood source is a tree planted in 1910 and still bears heavy crops.



King David *Arkansas, 1893* Thought to be an offspring of Arkansas Black and Jonathan. A solid red, late-season apple that hangs late on the tree and should be picked when full color develops. The yellow flesh is firm, crisp and juicy, a favorite apple in the Oak Glen area. Ripens in September-October.



Macintosh *Canada, 1870* Extensively grown in the Northeast, only a few trees of this variety were found outside of Oak Glen. The version we saw was Macintosh Red, which was almost solid red and would be confused with Spartan (a Macintosh offspring) if it wasn't for the age of the tree. The green skin is blushed almost solid red except for where shaded by leaves. The flesh is white, tender, crisp, spicy, juicy, and highly aromatic. Wonderful off the tree, they turn mealy in storage. Ripens in September.



Red Rome An inferior-tasting but better colored offspring of Rome Beauty. This is the variety that you will most likely find in the supermarket with the name "Rome". The skin is a beautiful deep red with white dots. The flesh is snow-white and the red color from the skin often bleeds into the flesh at the outer edges. The flesh is hard, crisp, tart, and not very sweet. However cooking brings out a wonderful apple flavor. Ripens the same time as Rome Beauty in late October.



Rome Beauty *Ohio, 1848* The most popular apple in our local mountains because of its versatility and reliable late blossoms that miss the killing frosts. Fruit medium to very large with a thick green skin handsomely striped to almost solid red with white flesh. A favorite baking and drying apple, a good keeper on and off the tree. When first picked the apple is tough, juicy, aromatic, and well flavored. The fresh-eating quality degrades in storage but they still make good pies, dried apples, and cider. Ripens October, self-fertile, bears early and heavily. Tested good in Southern California (and Central Mexico for that matter).



Snow *France, 1730* Also called *Fameuse*, Snow apple is delicious for eating out-of-hand and gets its name from the snow-white flesh. During the American Revolution a contingent of Hessian soldiers planted an orchard with Snow apples near Winchester, Virginia where they were interned. One of the McIntosh's parents; popular in the United States for more than 150 years. A very vigorous tree that bears early and heavily. Deep crimson, very tender, aromatic, juicy, sweet and tart with a distinct cider flavor, hardy and long-lived. Snow white flesh. Ripens in late September.



Stayman *Kansas, 1866* Also called *Stayman Winesap*, Stayman is a great apple that improves on its parent, Winesap. The skin is greenish-yellow washed, splashed and striped with a dull red. The flesh is yellowish, fine-grained, firm, breaking, juicy, and has a nice sweet-tart flavor. As a Winesap descendent, it is pollen sterile, so it needs a pollinator, and it won't pollinate other apples. It ripens in October and is a good keeper.



Twenty Ounce Pippin *New York, 1840*. A whopper of an apple. Attractive huge fruit, red stripes over a greenish background with a curiously "peened" surface. Semi-firm, crisp, sweet, mild white flesh. The tree is vigorous and bears early in its lifetime (precocious). Ripens unevenly September to October. One of the premier cooking apples of the nineteenth century.



White Winter Pearmain *England, 1200s* An English apple that dates back to Norman times that is still in cultivation, and for good reason. The green waxy, tough skin that resembles Granny Smith (but has brown dots instead of white) covers a crisp, tender, fine-grained flesh. The flavor is rich and aromatic, good for fresh eating and cider. In storage the skin will turn yellow and shrivel a bit with a rubbery feel, but the flesh stays crisp and flavorful for months, even unrefrigerated. We found this being grown all over our local mountains, and it was once quite popular in the Midwest. Despite its English heritage it does quite well in warm climates and is considered a "low chill" apple that fruits reliably every year. We're doing what we can to see that it's around another 800 years.



Virginia Winesap *Prior to 1915*. It ripens late October and the ones on the top of the tree turn deep red, almost purple. It has the heart-shape of a Winesap. They improve in storage and emit a wonderful aroma. The skin turns rather greasy, and the white flesh yellows and mellows a bit to be an incredibly rich, spicy, aromatic flavor that's been described as "appley". They also grow well down in the hot valleys of Southern California, but do not attain the same color as up in the mountains. If it is indeed a Winesap offshoot it is probably pollen-sterile, so a pollinator is required.



Winter Banana *Indiana, 1876* Aromatic and mildly flavored, Winter Banana is considered too mild for cooking and is thus relegated to fresh eating. It bruises easily and does not keep long. The beautiful, waxy lemon yellow skin has a light pink to intense orange blush on the sunny side that often looks as if it was spray-painted. It is also peppered with flecks of black and bright carmine. The flesh is firm, crisp, and juicy, but do not feel bad if you cannot detect a hint of banana.



Yellow Bellflower *New Jersey, 1700's* Shake this apple and you may hear the seeds rattling in the hollow core. The calyx end (bottom) has a distinct pinched or puckered look to it. The skin starts out green and then mellows to a lemon yellow with a pinkish-orange blush. The flesh is warm white, crisp, firm, fine-grained, and has a sweet flavor with a hint of tartness. Good for fresh-eating, pies, and sauce.



Beware of Seedling Apples

An apple tree does not reproduce true to seed, which means that even if you plant seeds from a great apple, the apples that seedling tree will produce most likely will be sour duds. Only one in 10,000 seedling apple trees are any good, but since they have healthy, vigorous roots, pioneers would plant seedling trees then lop the tops off and graft choice varieties onto them. But this means any suckers coming up from the roots will bear poor quality apples and any apples that fall to the ground and sprout trees will also be bad. Some of these apples will bear a resemblance to their parent, but one taste will tell you that they are not the same. These seedling apples are called "spitters", as the first thing you do when biting into one is look for a place to spit it out as they are either tasteless, astringent, sour, or bitter.



This tree has sprouted from the roots of the dead tree seen above. It was loaded with apples that tasted nasty, as is typical for apples sprouted from roots or seeds.

Unidentified Varieties

These are apples that we've found but have no clue what they are. If you can help us ID them, please email us at apples@kuffelcreek.com



This tree was at the Arrowhead Ranger Station. The apples were sweet, kind of fruity flavored, but very, very chewy, approaching rubbery. They ripened in October.

Varieties That Were Conspicuously Absent

These are apple varieties that were popular in the pioneer era that we would have expected to see, but found no examples outside of Oak Glen. We include them so you can keep an eye out for them.

Granny Smith *Australia, 1868* This should be your last guess when looking at a green apple, as White Winter Pearmain was (and is) considered a much superior apple. It is named after Mrs. Smith who threw out a washtub of French Crabapple trimmings and had it sprout from the pile. The green skin is covered with white dots and ripe specimens can have an orange to red blush on the sunny side (which you'll never see in the store). The crisp white flesh is familiar to all, as is its baking qualities. They ship and store well, which endears it to grocers.



Jonathan *New York, early 1800's* The early-season counterpart to the other Northeastern favorite, Macintosh, Jonathan can vary in flavor from mild to tart. It is the sire of many commercial crosses such as Jonamac and Jonagold, and has a famous parent in Esopus Spitzenburg. The baseball-round apple has a thin, tough, red skin with white dots and faint red stripes. The flesh is crisp, fine-textured, juicy, and may be stained with red (much better tasting than Red Rome, a look-alike). Good for fresh-eating and sauce, it turns to mush when baked. It ripens mid-September through mid-October, and does not keep well.



Northern Spy *New York, 1800* The consummate pie apple, and one of the best loved for eating out as hand, say some people. Of excellent quality when grown in a cold climate, it loses its quality grown further south. The newly-planted trees are notorious for taking a long time to start to bear apples. The large apple can be round to heart-shaped, and has a green skin with narrow red stripes that bruises easily. The flesh is yellowish white, juicy, and sweetly tart. It has high vitamin C content. They ripen in late September into October and will keep until spring.

