Chapter Three

Fruit
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Apples

The Crabapple, or Wild Apple, is native to Britain and is the wild ancestor of all the cultivated varieties of apple trees. Apples were abundant before the Norman Conquest and were probably introduced into Britain by the Romans. Pliny mentions twenty-two varieties – now, probably two thousand are cultivated throughout the world, about twenty of which are available in the United States.

Apples that are sold commercially are grown for uniformity and keeping capacity, not for flavor. In other words, there is nothing delicious about the Delicious apple any more. And most commercially produced apples are so pesticide-infested that you will be healthier if you don’t eat them. In fact, apples rank number eight on the list of the twelve most contaminated fruits and vegetables. Apples are the fruit most often consumed by children, and a two-year-old eating half an apple would ingest more than the government’s daily safe pesticide exposure level.

The good news is that organically grown apples are an excellent source of fiber, calcium, phosphorus, iron, potassium, vitamins C and A, and folate. Their antioxidant properties exceed those of oranges, grapefruit, carrots, spinach, onions and green peppers.

We grow a number of varieties, many of them of Japanese origin. We have chosen the varieties so that we have fresh apples from late June through late October. The early apples are for juice, cider and fresh eating, the later ones are “keepers”. We wash and box them and keep them in cool storage, and eat them throughout the winter. In early summer they become a bit wrinkled, at which time I turn them into applesauce.

Culinary Tips

- Eat apples with the skin on. Almost half of the vitamin C in apples is just beneath the skin, and the skin contains the insoluble fiber content.
- If you dry apples, slice them thin and immerse them in lemon juice before putting them on the dryer racks. This will keep them from oxidizing (and hence maintain their color) and add a wonderful tartness to the dried apple. Henning carries a bag of these in his pocket when he is out working on the farm.
- Add apples to sauerkraut, cooked cabbage and liver dishes to make their flavor milder.

Applesauce

Applesauce is easy to make and to preserve by canning. You can peel the apples or not; peeled, the processed fruit is smoother; with the peels, you retain more of the vitamin C.

Put a little water into the bottom of a large pot. Cut chunks of apple away from the core and add to the water, stirring from time to time. Add small amounts of cinnamon, nutmeg, sugar, and salt to the sauce as it begins to cook down, according to
taste. Constantly adding fresh apple chunks creates a nice sauce with plenty of chunks of apple – nothing like the stuff available in jars, which has the consistency of baby food. Can according to directions (see Keeping the Harvest section in this book) and enjoy all year. We like applesauce on pancakes, topped by yogurt.

**Applesauce Oatmeal Muffins**

*For the muffins:*
1 & ½ C regular oats
1 & ¼ C flour
¾ tsp cinnamon
1 tsp baking powder
¾ tsp baking soda
1 C applesauce
½ C milk
½ C brown sugar, packed
3 T corn oil
1 egg

*For the topping:*
½ C regular oats
2 T packed brown sugar
1/8 tsp cinnamon
2 T melted butter

Mix all ingredients for the muffins, and place the mix in twelve greased muffin tins. Mix ingredients for topping, and spoon a little topping over each muffin. Bake at 400 for 20 minutes.

**Baked Apples**

Heat oven to 375. Core apples. Remove 1 inch of skin around the middle to prevent splitting. Place apples upright in a baking dish. Fill center of each apple with 1 T brown sugar, 1 tsp butter, and 1/8 tsp cinnamon. Pour ¼ inch water into baking dish. Bake 30 or 40 minutes until apples are tender. Baste during baking. During winter, Henning likes to bake this dish on top of our wood-burning stove in a cast iron frying pan. The results are delicious!

**Hood River Fresh Apple Cake**

I grew up in Hood River, Oregon, a valley between Mount Hood and the Columbia River. I remember its four distinct seasons, and the sweet cherries, plums, pears, grapes, peaches, and apples we raised on our two-acre farm. It was a pleasure for me to discover *A Taste of Oregon*, a book of recipes from Oregon chefs, and to adapt the following recipe, which I make every year when fresh apples are in season.

1 C bran flakes
1 C sugar
1 C butter, softened
2 eggs
2 C flour
2 tsps baking soda
1 tsp cinnamon
½ tsp salt
4 C chopped apples
1 C chopped walnuts
Powdered sugar for topping

Cream together bran, sugar, butter, and eggs. Sift the dry ingredients and add to mixture. Add chopped apples and nuts. Bake in a buttered 9 x 13 inch pan for 45 minutes at 350 degrees.

Remove from oven, and sift powdered sugar over the top while the cake is still warm.
Berries

Most of the berries we raise in our gardens have a wild ancestry in North America. You can still find tiny wild strawberries on dusty roadsides in the Northwest (most people who know where the annual patches are keep their location a deep, dark secret). Anyone who does not take a container to gather wild huckleberries while on a hike is missing the point of the trip, in my opinion. Oregon Grape and elderberries are plentiful in the woods, as are blackberries in fields and along roadsides. I think of wild berries as God’s special gifts – we don’t have to plant, water, or cultivate them; we just get to enjoy them.

Nutritional Information

Berries are the newest of the discovered cancer fighters. According to Newsweek (June 17, 2002), “50 years of scientific research have demonstrated that the healthiest diets are rich in fruits and vegetables. And various kinds of berries – while no substitute for broccoli – definitely contribute. New studies suggest they may help prevent everything from heart disease to age-related brain decline. ‘In the past we would’ve said that the main reason to eat berries was vitamin C,’ says Ronald Wrolstad, professor of food science at Oregon State University. ‘Then we learned about potassium, fiber, and folate. Today we’re learning that berries are also rich in antioxidants.’” This property is due to their pigment – and the darker the berry the stronger the protective function.

We grow strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, and black and red currants, and pick the blackberries that grow in abundance nearby. Blueberries, strawberries, and blackberries are wonderful for fresh eating, and the excess can be frozen to eat over ice cream, mixed in yogurt, or make into jam. Black and red currants are a bit sour, so I add sugar and make them into juice, which we enjoy all winter. They are very high in vitamin C. Before international trade made citrus fruits available to them, Norwegians stayed healthy during the winters by eating preserved black currants.

Blackberries

There are two species of blackberry growing wild in the Northwest, and there is a history behind that. The evergreen blackberry was brought across the plains by the women of the first emigrant train in 1843, and was watered and tended carefully so it could be planted in new gardens. Then settlers discovered that the native wild blackberry was far superior to the Evergreen in size, flavor, and texture, so the imports were left to run wild. They have, in many cases, supplanted the wild blackberry, and in some places have become a serious pest. We enjoy both varieties, but I prefer the wild berry. Evergreen berries, when mature, are soft and sweet. They have broad, flat leaves and serious thorns. Wild blackberries are firm and tart. They have small, gray-green leaves, and serious thorns. They are easy to freeze and wonderful for jams and juices, if you have the abundance to get beyond pies and fresh eating.
Strawberries

Dr. William Butler, 17th Century English writer, said, “Doubtless God could have made a better berry, but doubtless God never did.”

The strawberry has an ancient lineage in both Europe and America. It is associated with Venus, because of its heart shape and red color. In Bavaria, country folk traditionally tied small baskets of strawberries to the horns of their cattle as an offering to elves. Ideally the elves, who are passionately fond of strawberries, would help produce healthy calves and abundant milk. In America, Indians baked crushed strawberries with cornmeal, a recipe that English settlers quickly developed into today’s strawberry shortcake.

Wild strawberries are propagated by birds. The seeds, which are on the outside (unique among fruits) pass through them intact. Germinating seeds respond to light rather than moisture, and therefore need no covering of earth to start growing.

Alas, commercially grown strawberries are Number 1 on the list of contaminated foods. The pesticides, herbicides and fungicides they contain include carcinogens and chemicals that interfere with human hormone production. Those poison-red berries without scent or flavor that tempt us in the supermarket as the first sign of spring are toxic. Pass them by. Grow your own in a garden or container, or find an organic source.

Blueberries

Blueberries really have a history. A relative of the blueberry plant is regarded by botanists to be over 13,000 years old. Native to Europe, Asia, and America, blueberries have been a staple food for people (and bears, who will travel up to fifteen miles on an empty stomach to make it to a blueberry patch) for centuries.

Blueberries are the newest Superhero among foods, because they contain more antioxidants than any other fruit or vegetable, and studies investigating their brainpower-boosting properties in rats bode well for people.

Currants

(Note: much of the nutritional information in this section comes from The Doctors’ Book of Food Remedies.)

Unless you have a bush in your back yard, or have a local source, black currants are hard to come by. (The “black currants” sold in grocery stores are really zante grapes.) Their present scarcity is due to the fact that, in the early 1900s, the U.S. Department of Agriculture banned their cultivation because the shrubs harbored a fungus that destroyed white pine trees. The ban was lifted when new cultivars were developed in the 1960s, but currants have not really made a comeback. This is a shame, because currants are a terrific source of Vitamin C and fiber. A half-cup of currants has 101 mg of Vitamin C, 168% of the Recommended Daily Value. They also contain ellagic acid, which is an antioxidant that neutralizes free radicals, and thereby helps to prevent cancer.

The fiber in currants (and other berries) aids digestion, and helps prevent heart disease.
Black and red currants can be frozen. I prefer to make them into juice. The berries are tart, and require sugar to make them palatable in juices or compotes. The juice comes out as a concentrate; mixing it with water or a sweeter juice (such as plum or grape) reduces the acidity of the currant juice. (See section on Keeping the Harvest.)

Raspberries

Like all other berries, raspberries contain high amounts of Vitamin C, fiber, and ellagic acid. Eat them fresh. Raspberry jam is delicious, but the cooking process destroys Vitamin C.

Smoothies

You can make these only if you have a source of natural whey, the second component of quark. (See Dairy section for how to make quark.)

Place a cup of frozen raspberries in the bowl of a food processor. Add a couple of tablespoons of honey. As you process, pour whey through the feeding tube of the processor. The mixture will foam up and turn a glorious pink color. Pour into glasses. Since whey is pure protein, this delectable drink will serve as breakfast or a snack, and keep you going for a long time. When Henning is working outside on a hot day, I whip up a smoothie for him, adding a raw egg for protein.

You can use any frozen berries for smoothies, but we find that raspberries lend a wonderful tartness to the drink.
Melons

Melons are an ancient fruit, which originated in the Middle East, and were widely grown throughout Europe by the third century AD. They came to America on Columbus’s second voyage, were well known on the East Coast by the 17th century, and widely grown by the 19th.

Rightly so! This delicious fruit is 95% water, so it serves as a natural diuretic. It has only 5% sugar, and 0% fat. It is an excellent source of vitamins A and C, and a good source of iron, calcium, potassium, and beta-carotene.

Melons are cucurbits, related to watermelon, pumpkins squashes, gourds, and cucumbers.

We grow cantaloupes and honeydew melons on the farm. Because of our relatively cool climate, we baby them more than any other crop – raising the seedlings on a heating pad, providing the soil with rich compost, and planting the seedlings into the garden under black plastic, which retains the heat. We are richly rewarded in late summer with daily melons for breakfast, lunch, and dessert.

Culinary Tips

- Melons are ready to be picked when they slip from the vine.
- Melons don’t store well; don’t keep them for more than 2 days in the refrigerator.

My mother used to give us halves of cantaloupe filled with vanilla ice cream as a special treat on a hot summer night. I still like them that way, although I also like to serve them with cottage cheese or berries, or make them part of a colorful fruit salad.

I salt melon lightly; other people like ginger, or pepper.
Rhubarb

Rhubarb is usually cooked as a fruit, but it is classified as a vegetable, since it is a close relation to garden sorrel. It originated in China and Tibet, where it was prized for its medicinal purposes. It is particularly useful in relieving constipation, which it does because it is an excellent source of fiber. Rhubarb is also a good source of vitamin C.

Culinary Tips

• Don’t eat the leaves, and don’t put them in your compost pile. The leaves contain oxalic acid, which is toxic.
• Rhubarb contains a lot of water, and therefore does not store well. Pick the stalks you intend to use that day, in the morning, popping them carefully from the ground-level sheath.
• Because rhubarb is so tart, it is a temptation to cook it with a lot of sugar. Instead, cook it with orange juice, ginger or cinnamon, which will sweeten the rhubarb without adding a lot of empty calories.

Stewed Rhubarb

This is the simplest way to prepare rhubarb. Remove the largest strings from the stalk, cut the stalk into 1-inch pieces, and cook gently in a little water, adding sugar, honey, cinnamon, ginger, or orange juice, as desired. Serve on pancakes, over ice cream, or mixed with strawberries and topped with cream.

Rhubarb Fool

There are two versions of the origin of this name: one is that the second word comes from “fouler” – French for “to mash” or “to press”; the other is that “Any fool can make it.” I think both are apt. There are many elaborate recipes for Rhubarb Fool. The simplest (and one of the best) is just to fold stewed rhubarb into stiffly whipped cream, and top with minced, candied ginger. The contrasting textures and flavors make this a toothsome, light dessert, best served in a parfait glass.

Rhubarb Pie

A tart, delicious pie. If you like, you can mitigate the tartness by using half strawberries – fresh or frozen, for the filling.

Pastry for a two-crust, 10-inch pie.
1 c sugar
½ C flour
5 C stewed rhubarb
3 T butter

Heat oven to 425. Prepare pastry. Stir together sugar and flour. Turn half the rhubarb (and strawberries, if used) onto the bottom of the pastry-lined pie plate, and sprinkle with half the sugar mixture. Repeat with remaining filling and sugar, and dot with butter. Cover with the top crust, and cut slits in it to release steam. Cover the top of the pie crust with aluminum foil to prevent excess browning; remove the foil twenty minutes before the pie comes out of the oven. Bake 40-50 minutes.

**Rhubarb Coffee Cake**

This recipe is adapted from Elizabeth Henderson’s *FoodBook for a Sustainable Harvest.*

½ C butter
1 C sugar
1 egg, beaten
2 C flour
½ tsp salt
1 tsp baking soda
1 C buttermilk
2 C rhubarb, chopped, with large strings removed
1 tsp vanilla
Extra sugar and some cinnamon for topping

Cream butter and sugar; add egg and beat. Sift dry ingredients and add alternately with buttermilk. Gently blend in rhubarb and vanilla. Pour into 9x13 inch baking pan. Sprinkle top with a bit of sugar and cinnamon. Bake at 350 for 45 minutes, or until a knife inserted in the cake comes out clean.