

We are too far from the lake to be in the fruit belt, and Coe Creek Farm is a colder than average piece of ground even for our area. But, if it doesn't freeze at blossom time, we often have good crops of apples. This is one of those years.

There are just a couple old deliberately planted trees left on the farm. The others have all been destroyed by time and/or weather. But, in the yard there are two ancient Duchess of Oldenburg trees. And, this year, the apple blossoms did not freeze.

Duchess apples are early. Yellow Transparents are even earlier, but even the Duchess bears its fruit in August and early September. That has made apples, apple crisp, applesauce, apple pie, and apple cake appear on the menu almost every day. And, as far as I can tell, we are in no danger of becoming tired of fresh apple recipes any time soon.

I started cooking applesauce this year when the Duchess fruits were not full grown and very green. The seeds were entirely white, and the fruits had that look of immaturity and that degree of tartness that can only be called "sour." I was surprised that the applesauce cooked up so clear and fresh looking, and did so very quickly. It did take a little more sugar than it does now, a couple of weeks later, but we appreciated the fresh taste of applesauce after months without it on the table. Last year, there was not a surviving blossom on any apple tree in our area after the spring frosts.

Now, the Duchess apples are no longer green. They have brown seeds and the flesh looks juicy and translucent.

There are other apples ripening as the season for Duchess wanes. I don't know what they are, because we get the rest of our apples from seedling trees. Deer or birds may have planted them, or one of us, in our youth, might have thrown an apple core to the side from a hayfield or as we brought the cows up from the woods in the evening.

It is always interesting to try apples from a tree new to us, especially as we have no idea at all how they may taste. Once in a while, there is an indication—in size, color, time of ripening, or shape—of which known apples are its relatives. But, really, we don't know that, either. What we do know is what use we can make of them. If they are reasonably sound, not terribly small, and tasty, they may become favored targets for our interest during apple season.

If one is really very curious about the origin of an apple, there is now DNA testing that can determine the parentage of an tree. But, I think we will let the mystery remain.

In our garden are some young apple trees. These we planted, and it is interesting to see how long it takes for them to begin to bear. The Yellow Transparent had 20 apples that were ripening this year. But something—"how high can a woodchuck chuck?" or a raccoon, perhaps. took 15 of them one night. So, i picked the remaining five and cooked a little bowl of applesauce. That mystery will probably never be solved.

When I was growing up, we picked most of our apples from a seedling tree in the Speicher Field. These were good for both cooking and eating, and they were reliable—barring those spring frosts that often blackened the blooms. When these apples were ripe, they were yellow and had a distinctive perfume and flavor. It was a sprawling, ungainly tree, not built to last, and when it succumbed to age and weather, our best apple source was gone.

What isn't gone, though, is the swampy pond that lay near the tree. We called that The Apple Tree Pond, and though there hasn't been an apple tree there for decades, the pond still retains its name. Perhaps, we should plant an apple tree there, so that, in the future, someone might once again get fruit from the seedling tree by the Apple Tree Pond.