



FOR ALL
Seasons

***Georgian Bay
Fruit Growing Region***

BY ROSALEEN EGAN

From heritage McIntosh to newer varieties, through large-scale farms and friendly markets, Ontario apples grown south of Georgian Bay can be consumed fresh year round, or as baked goods, sauce, cider, and juice. Generations of innovative farmers, and the favourable influences of the temperature of the lake water, types of soil, and the Niagara Escarpment influence the success of growing apples. The area produces around 25 per cent of the province's annual apple crop with more than 15 varieties.



▲ Gerbe Botden, orchard manager for Blue Mountain Fruit Company, explains high-density apple growing. Trees are spaced close together to reduce land and pesticide use, and to produce higher yields.

The Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) calls the area the Georgian Bay Fruit Growing Region, identifies it as one of nine areas in the province with climate and soils most suited to fruit production, and notes it as “the most northern apple producing area. The first planting here dates back to 1846... This district consists of three major pockets - Beaver Valley, surrounding the towns of Thornbury and Clarksburg, the Meaford area, and a third area comprising approximately 400 ha just south of Collingwood.

“The major apple-producing areas in Ontario are spread along the shores of Lake Ontario, Lake Erie, Lake Huron and Georgian Bay. These large, deep bodies of water are the main reason that apples are one of Ontario’s biggest and most diverse fruit crops,” continues OMAFRA.

Fruit grows in the Georgian Bay area, according to OMAFRA, “thanks to the deep cool water of the Nottawasaga Bay. The bay temperature changes slowly and moderates the air temperature, reducing chances of late spring or early fall frosts. In addition, the towering Niagara Escarpment creates a protective boundary to the south. These two geographical features create a special climate confined to a small, yet productive, area.”

Micro Climate

Irma Botden, co-owner of Blue Mountain Fruit Company in Thornbury says “The small micro climate has advantages for many varieties, and is not suitable for all. The snow helps to insulate trees, and cooler summertime temperatures prevent sunburn on the apples. If you are too close to the mountain, it’s too cold. The soil changes just km away, so the same variety of apples will ripen a few days apart.”

Ontario’s favourite apple, and Canada’s national apple, the McIntosh Red was an early apple to take root in the area. It was brought there by David Doran, a United Empire Loyalist originally from New York State. In 1837 he received a land grant in Cape Rich, St Vincent Township, now within the Municipality of Meaford. Doran learned of the apple through his sister Hannah, who was married to John McIntosh of Dundas County in Ontario, and was the original propagator of the McIntosh cultivar.

Doran started a McIntosh orchard at Cape Rich. Apples, other than crab

▼ Seasonal workers are essential to the success of the apple industry. Here they are picking Red Prince directly into bins to lessen handling and bruising. The machine replaces ladders and steers itself down the row freeing the workers to pick, passing down a row two to three times each time they pick.



► The Red Prince apple is described as crisp, sweet and tangy. It is great fresh and can be used in recipes and baking. Its red skin is high in antioxidants.





▼ Irma Botden, co-owner of Blue Mountain Fruit Company, sits at the shore of Georgian Bay in the Thornbury harbour, enjoying a Honey Crisp apple, one of several varieties they grow. The water of the bay and the Niagara Escarpment combine to create a microclimate beneficial to apple growing.

▼ Three carts of freshly picked Red Prince apples, exclusively grown in Canada by Blue Mountain Fruit Company in Thornbury. Red Prince is a natural cross of Golden Delicious and a Red Jonathan apple. Red Prince is picked in the fall and cellared until January to reach peak flavour. It is available in grocery stores from January to summer.



pples are also grown elsewhere along the Escarpment!



Here are some of the other places to buy locally grown apples:

Andrews Scenic Acres, Milton

- Pick-your-own around mid Sept.: Spy, Macintosh and Freedom apples
- Other farms' apples sold in shop from mid September.

"There is absolutely nothing that beats a crisp, delicious apple right off the tree. That freshness is unique and wonderful. We have apples for all types of apple lovers - sweet or tart. We also have a great selection of apple-based products: pies, jams, wines and ciders."

Hildreth Farm Market, Beamsville

- Grow some apples of their own: Mutsu, Golden Delicious, Red Delicious and Paula Red. They are available in Sept

and the beginning of October.

- Also sell apples from Mountainview Orchards who are big apple growers. All kinds of apples are carried in the fall.

The Apple Factory, Brampton

- Sell Early Macintosh, Ginger Gold, Macintosh, Spartan, Cortland, Mutsu, Gala, Golden Gala, Honeycrisp, Spartan.
- Ginger and early Macs are available in August
- All others from mid September through May or June depending on crop yield
- No pick-your-own here
- Sold by the lb and in 6.5 lb bags

-with files from Gloria Hildebrandt-

► Serving customers is a family tradition in the Lambe family. Cailey, shown here at the till, is the granddaughter of the current Grandma Lambe and is the fourth generation to operate a fruit stand in Meaford.



apples, are not native to North America and are usually grafted, not sown from seed. Other farmers began to grow apples, and the industry grew rapidly with 81 ha (200 acres) of orchards in the area by 1861. It kept growing until it suffered a setback in 1942.

As a response to war, the Canadian government expropriated Cape Rich properties, including what once belonged to David Doran, to create what is now Land Forces Central Area Training Centre, Meaford. Apple growing continued around the base with new varieties, new technologies, and new methods of growing introduced.

Descendants of the original David Doran, the Lambe family of Grandma Lambe's Fruit Markets in Meaford and Chatsworth, began with 4 ha (10 acres) of orchard growing McIntosh, Spy and Snow apples. They now grow 15 varieties on 53 ha (130 acres) to sell primarily at their markets, and through Bay Growers in Clarksburg to grocery stores.

The original Grandma Lambe, Mable (nee Doran), started selling apples from her garage in 1942. Her daughter-in-law, Grace, later added baked goods. That eventually led to the building of the now year-round "fruit stand" on Hwy 26. It's seen several expansions

in size and items for sale. A second store in Chatsworth opened, seasonally, in 2006.

Grace, who will be 90 this year, is the current Grandma Lambe and continues to work in the Meaford store with her daughter and granddaughter, Cailey Lambe. Cailey says, "I took over a lot of the business in the past year, doing much of the office work, ordering all of the products, and overseeing the day to day." She and her brother, Blake, carry on the tradition, and contribute fresh ideas.

Blake, a fifth-generation grower, and his father David operate the farm, G.H.Lambe & Son Ltd. New technology and machinery is being used for quality control. When old trees stop producing, they are replaced with high-



▲ A sampling of some of the more than 15 varieties of apples available at Grandma Lambe's Fruit Stand. These are half bushels of Spy, Cortland and McIntosh.



▲ Grandma Lambe's is much more than apples. Its year-round location on Hwy 26 has a range of baked goods, local and Ontario-sourced grocery items, home decor and gift items.



density orchards, enabling more efficient management and higher yields.

Farmers help each other with new technologies and innovative ways to improve the industry. They share information, and advise one another. Gerbe Botden, Orchard Manager, works with his parents Irma and Marius Botden of Blue Mountain Fruit Company. He is on the board of directors of the not-for-profit Georgian Bay Fruit Growers out of which he and a few others began Young Apple Farmers of Ontario.

Gerbe says, “We help each other because there is so much potential in the Ontario market for fruit. A lot of fruit is still imported.”

Recognizing this potential, and excited to live in Canada, Irma and Marius had emigrated from the Netherlands in 2001. They brought with them a new cultivar, Red Prince.

This writer first bought Red Prince in the grocery store on the basis of both its appearance and the fact that it was grown in Ontario. The remarkable

taste and freshness of the apple inspired this story. It is picked in the fall with the others and aged to allow the sweetness to increase, appearing in stores in January. The Botdens own exclusive rights to grow Red Prince in Canada. Cultivars are protected in the same way as intellectual property.

Irma says, “You have all the other varieties first and then Red Prince comes available, so Ontario can buy local apples year round.” The versatile apple stays firm and has good taste from January

to the summer. Modern storage allows varieties available in the fall such as Red Delicious, Ida Red, and Empire to be available into July. Early varieties begin mid-August. **NEV**

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▲ Fun photo opportunities at Grandma Lambe's on Hwy 26 near Meaford.



◀ The Georgian Bay Fruit Growing District is one of nine areas in Ontario identified with climate and soils most suited to fruit production by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. The three major pockets are Beaver Valley, surrounding the towns of Thornbury and Clarksburg, the Meaford area, and approximately 400 ha just south of Collingwood. Map courtesy of Meaford Museum.