

It's Apple Season!

As fall approaches, apples are starting to ripen and soon will be harvested. Today, there are over 2,500 varieties of apples grown in the United States. To help enjoy that variety of fresh apple flavors year-round, consider preserving them to add to your menu.

Apples can be preserved in a number of ways: dried or made into applesauce or apple butter, a delicious apple-pear jam or a tasty pie filling. Choose the preserving method that is best for your apple variety. Some examples include:

***Freezing** Golden Delicious, Granny Smith, Jonathan, Rome Beauty and Stayman

***Applesauce and apple butter** Golden Delicious, Gravenstein, Jonathan, McIntosh, and Rome

Beauty and Stayman

To select apples at peak maturity, look for these signs:

***Color Change:** As apples mature, the skin color at the stem and the calyx basin at the bottom of the apple turns from an immature green to a light yellow color. Some apples will develop a red skin color before they are ripe, so that is not a reliable indication of maturity.

***Flavor:** This is a good guide if you are familiar with the apples you have and know how they should taste. Even if you do not know the characteristic flavor of the kind of apple you have, you can still sample slices of a few apples and decide if they have a sweet flavor. If the apples are not ready to harvest, they will taste starchy or immature. If apples have already fallen and taste a bit starchy, store them for a period to see if they become sweeter.

***Flesh color:** As apples mature and starches change to sugars, the flesh changes from a very light green to white. You can see the difference when you cut a thin slice and hold it up to the light.

***Days from bloom:** The number of days from bloom is a reliable guide for general maturity time, though weather conditions will have some influence. Some

kinds of apples and approximate days from bloom to maturity are Jonathan-135, Delicious -145, Golden Delicious-145 and Winesap-155.

***Seed color: The seeds of most apples change from light green to brown as the fruit ripens. This indicator should be combined with other changes, since it is not absolute.**

Preserve apples as soon as possible after harvest. If any apples must be stored, keep them in a cool, dark place. They should not be tightly covered or wrapped up; a perforated plastic or open paper bag, basket or wooden crate are good choices. If kept in the refrigerator, apples should be placed in the humidifier compartment, in a plastic bag with several holes punched in it or in a zipper-type vegetable bag to prevent loss of moisture and crispness. Apples should not be placed close to foods with strong odors.