

# History Grows on Trees

The Westons preserve hundreds of rare and antique apple varieties at their Wisconsin orchard.

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The rustic white Dutch Colonial barn and farmhouse at Weston's Antique Apple Orchards in New Berlin, Wisconsin, always caught my eye on the drive home. Dreaming of apple cobbler, I finally found time to stop by on a sunny September afternoon.

Genevieve Weston greeted me. She operates the orchard along with her brother, Bill Weston. While I browsed the heirloom apples, she shared the farm's history with me.

"During the Great Depression in the 1930s, my great-grandfather William Markwardt swapped his large house in Milwaukee for this farmland. In 1935, William, my grandparents, Harvey and Alice Weston; my father, Ken; and my Aunt Genevieve moved to the farm."

At first, William raised chickens and had a foundry in the barn's basement, but both businesses failed. So he, Harvey and Alice looked at the other family farms nearby with successful orchards and decided to grow apples.

"My relatives started by planting varieties that they liked," Genevieve says. "My grandmother had a love of history, literature and all things English and German, so we have Cox's Orange Pippin (England, 1825), Gravenstein (1600s, Europe), Ashmead's Kernel (England,

1700s), Court Pendu Plat (France, 1613) and Duchess of Oldenberg (1700s, Russia). Shakespeare wrote of gilliflowers, so we have two varieties that share the name: the Black (1700s, Connecticut) and the Cornish (1813, United Kingdom)."

The farm also produces several types of sweet and tart cherries, plums, peaches and pears, as well as raspberries and gooseberries.

The family planted additional orchards during the 1950s and 1970s and has since added some modern varieties. "Our greatest challenges are the weather and staying true to our mission to preserve historical diversity while not alienating our customers. So we have Honeycrisp (Minnesota, 1960s), but we also have Chenango Strawberry (New York, 1800s). We do a lot of educating," Genevieve says.

Fruit is arranged in boxes around the perimeter of the barn. Some apples are best for eating fresh, and others are perfect for baked goods, cider or applesauce. Genevieve recommended that I purchase Wisconsin's own Wolf River apples, developed in the late 1800s, to make my cobbler. I made sure to grab plenty, because these are my mom's favorite pie apples, too.

Since my first visit, I've gone back many times to seek out some of the oldest and most obscure varieties.

Weston's Antique Apple Orchard is a living museum for heirloom varieties such as Ashmead's Kernel and Cox's Orange Pippin.

CHARLIE SHORT

Genevieve is passing along her love of apples to her partner's son, Alexander.



One evening after work Bill gave me a tour of the orchards. He and Genevieve both have full-time jobs off the farm.

"It is really nice to come home and do something with no technical challenge or stress," he says.

Their aunt still lives in the original farmhouse, and Bill and his wife live at the bottom of the newest orchard. He operates the integrated pest management program, maintains the equipment and works on pruning, mowing and applying fertilizer. After their busy harvest season, Bill says it's always nice to take December off. "The farm is prettiest after a heavy snow. I like to ride my horse around among the trees."

The orchard's greatest asset is quite possibly its location. The gorgeous view from the back of the barn looks out over the trees and surrounding valleys. The farm was added to the National Register of Historic Landscapes in 1992, and it sits on top of a glacial promontory in a preserved local historic district known as Prospect Hill.

"The orchard is unique because we have over 200 varieties from all six inhabited continents, including one from the original wild apple

grove in Kazakhstan," Genevieve says. "My favorite variety is the same as my father's: King David. It's from the late 1800s in Arkansas and tastes like sour cherry ball candy. My favorite cider apple is the Calville Blanc d'Hiver (late 1500s, France), which smells divine when pressed and is fantastic for drinking or using in cooking."

Weston's Antique Apple Foundation, a nonprofit group, covers the costs of running the orchards. Ken and Aunt Genevieve donated 10 acres and the house to the city of New Berlin in 2004. "The city maintains the buildings and we do the orchard work and keep any revenue. It's a free lease," Bill says.

Should the family become unable to run the orchard, the city will maintain the land as a park. However, the Westons do not see that happening in the near future.

"My aunt and father are doing what they can do, and I anticipate they will continue as long as they can. And on Friday I'll be loading up with my partner's 6-year-old son. I started going to the market at age 4, weighing the fruit and filling the baskets. You cannot be too young to start learning the business." R



## A Bushel of Flavor

After a trip to the apple orchard, try this spicy applesauce recipe that **Marian Platt of Sequim, Washington**, shared with our sister magazine *Taste of Home*. It's featured in *Most Requested Recipes 2016*. For a 30-day free trial, go to [tasteofhomebooks.com/FRMT](http://tasteofhomebooks.com/FRMT).

### Spicy Applesauce

**TAKES:** 55 MIN.  
**MAKES:** 12 SERVINGS

- 5 pounds tart apples (about 16 medium), peeled and sliced**
- 1 cup apple juice**
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon**
- 1/2 teaspoon ground allspice**
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cloves**

- 1.** Combine all ingredients in a Dutch oven; bring to a boil.
- 2.** Reduce heat and simmer, covered, for 25-35 minutes or until the apples are tender, stirring occasionally.
- 3.** Remove from heat; mash apples to desired consistency.



To read more about the unusual apples grown at Weston's, visit [westonapples.com](http://westonapples.com)