

October 13, 2011

## Cider week rules

How about them New York apples? As delicious as fine wine, some say

By CHRIS ERIKSON

It's apple season, and customers at Hicks Orchard in upstate Granville are carting away sweet, crisp Macouns, Ginger Golds and Empires by the bushel. But some of the apple varieties co-owner Dan Wilson is most excited about harvesting are of scant interest to seasonal snackers — in fact they taste more like a bleaching agent than anything you'd want to put in a pie.

Instead, they'll go into Slyboro Cider, the cidery Wilson and his wife, Susan Knapp, founded in 2001, as an adjunct to the orchard that's been in Wilson's family since 1974.

The pair are among a small but growing number of upstate apple growers who are reviving a lost American tradition by making hard cider, a drink that was once as ubiquitous in these parts as water. And starting Sunday, they'll be among the local producers whose wares will be featured during Cider Week, a program of tastings, pairing dinners and other events designed to spotlight a beverage that aficionados say is both overlooked and misunderstood.



Cider makers say their hard stuff is a sub for wines. They'll show how during Cider Week.

“We want people to understand that cider can be a sophisticated, complex drink, not just a sweet, alcoholic, fizzy apple juice,” says Sara Grady of Glynwood, an agricultural nonprofit based in Cold Spring, NY, and the driving force behind Cider Week. “It’s a food-friendly beverage with incredible diversity, just as with beer and wine.”

Cider Week grew out of Glynwood’s mission to aid Hudson Valley farmers, in part by identifying “high value” uses for their output. Cider is a perfect fit, both because the region’s struggling orchards could use a boost and because of hard cider’s potential appeal to big-city foodies who revere the hand-crafted and the local.

Then there’s the historical cachet of the drink, which was a household staple from colonial days through the 19th century. It gave way to beer as people migrated to cities and industrial breweries multiplied — then Prohibition “was the final blow,” says Grady.

That historical connection was a draw for Wilson, who saw “an opportunity not just for creative uses of apples, but also to plug into the history of our region and the historical uses of apples.”

He sees big potential to build a market for hard cider, which, he notes, is relatively inexpensive and offers wide variety, from dry to sweet, still to sparkling; there's rich "ice cider" and pommeau, a mix of unfermented cider and apple brandy.

Having built a small local market, Wilson is looking to take things to the next level, with "broader exposure, down into the city."

Which is exactly what Grady hopes Cider Week will kick-start. She says the response has been "overwhelming" — including interest from more than 60 restaurants, which will offer pairings or otherwise feature cider.

Among them is Hearth in the East Village, where operations manager David Flaherty raves about the ciders he's been tasting from upstate, and says the half-dozen bottles he offers have been a hit.

"People are surprised at the level of quality, the range of styles and the fact that it's amazing with food," he says.

Such talk is music to the ears of Grady and other cider boosters, who see cider taking its place alongside craft-brewed beer — noting it wasn't long ago that the average drinker didn't know an IPA from an imperial stout.

"I see something similar happening with cider," says Wilson. "There's a whole world of possibilities."

For a program of Cider Week events, go to [ciderweek.com](http://ciderweek.com).

### **Sampling a flight of cider**

After a few ill-fated run-ins with rotgut apple hooch as an exchange student in England, Hearth restaurant bar manager David Flaherty figured he was done with cider forever. Then he was assigned to put together a cider list, and was surprised to find a big world beyond the sweet and the fizzy.

"There's sparkling stuff with pure fruit flavors, there's bone-dry stuff, there's stuff with a deep, complex funk, there's high-acid stuff that twists your palate up in a knot," he says.

To illustrate the point, he led The Post through a tasting tour. It started with Doc's Draft, from Warwick, NY, an exemplar of a straight-up, semi-dry, sparkling cider — "clean and tart, with a pure fruit flavor."

Sarasola from Spain's Basque region threw a change-up, with lemony bitterness and a "yeasty funk" — with its acidity, it pairs well with rich mains like roast duck or pork.

J.K.'s Scrupy from Michigan had a nose of cinnamon and clove and the "smell of fall."

Flaherty's enthusiasm built as we worked through Farnum Hill Extra Dry from New Hampshire ("So elegant; very much like a wine in its complexity") and Eve's Northern Spy from the Hudson Valley. ("That's terroir, right there — really exciting.")

He suggests pairing such dry ciders with lighter meats (fish, chicken) and "anything grilled." Sweeter, fruitier ones are good with appetizers or as an aperitif.

For her part, Amanda Reade Sturgeon of Dovetail loves cider-pork pairings. And she's a fan of rich, concentrated "ice ciders" — she has one from Dupont in Normandy on her list; closer to home, both Slyboro and Eve's make ice ciders. "A small glass is really nice with dessert," she says.