

# Apple Cider Making

By Lynn Coffey



*Apples being gathered in baskets for homemade cider*

Nothing heralds the start of fall like the smell of pumpkin pies baking and the taste of fresh squeezed apple cider. Storebought cider that has been heated and pasteurized has lost its zest and sparkle and tastes rather flat compared to the kind that's made from a variety of apples, picked right from the tree and turned into amber gold squeezed from a hand-cranked cider press.

Over the years I've interviewed three men who operated large commercial family cider mills that are sadly no longer in business; My uncle, Bill Cessna, helped his father run the family mill in Rosemont, Ohio; John Hailey, who owned the Stuarts Draft Cider Mill; and Leon Sheets of the Sheets Cider Mill in Fort Defiance. These large mills took apples and processed them into cider for the individuals who brought them or sold the cider they pressed to local stores around the area.

Our family was lucky to have an antique hand-cranked press to make small batches of fresh cider from the apple trees on our property and we began saving one-gallon plastic milk jugs months before the actual squeezing began. We didn't make a lot of cider but we did make was enjoyed by friends and neighbors as well as our own family. The fridge was full of gallon jugs for weeks on end and I learned the hard way that trying to stop the fermenting process by placing the cider in the freezer was NOT the way to go. Opening the freezer door to see how things were progressing, I was greeted by two gallons that had blown their tops and had spewed the fermenting cider over everything. What a sticky mess! From then on, we just enjoyed the sparkling cider for as long as it would last and the delicious liquid never made it to the point of being alcoholic in our house!

Homemade cider makes use of apples that are not one-hundred percent perfect. A blemish or two is fine but apples that are spoiled, wormy, or rotten will cause the juice to ferment too quickly and needs to be discarded. For the best flavor, blend different types of apples together instead of just one variety. The result is unfiltered, unsweetened cider that has no additives. For a gallon of cider, twenty to thirty apples are needed.



*View of an antique cider press*



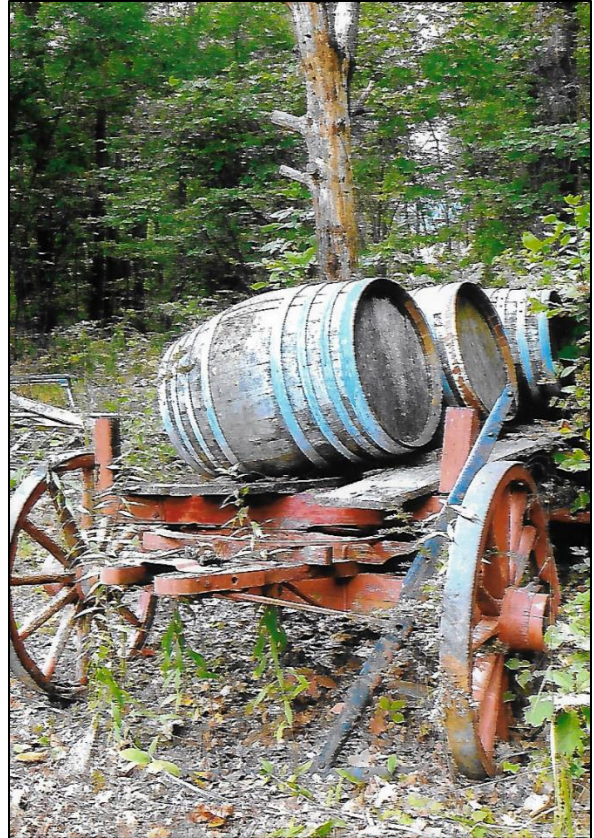
*Cider being pressed into waiting pans*

Here's how the process worked. Our press had a wooden chute where we put apples that had been washed and cut into small pieces. Inside the chute, a cylinder equipped with sharp teeth ground the apple pieces into pulp as a metal wheel was turned. As the pulp was pulverized, it would fall into a slatted wooden vat, known as the hopper, that we lined with a layer of cheesecloth or a pillowcase to catch debris. When enough of the pulp dropped into the hopper, the pressing plate was lowered by the turn crank and the resulting liquid squeezed out through a downspout at the bottom of the hopper and into a pan or bucket. The process was halted until the contents from the pan was poured into the empty one-gallon jugs. That accomplished, the remaining squeezed out pulp was scraped out and another batch added to start over. The whole operation could be handled by two people and about the only obstacle was the abundance of bees who thought the cider and its residue were pretty tasty, too. Cleanup was handled with a garden hose to the sticky press and trekking to the woods to dump the leftover pulp, where the bees joyfully followed.

This fall, see if you can locate someone who is making fresh apple cider, stop and buy a gallon or two. Local farm stands, autumn festivals and farmer's markets are three good places to look also. The taste of homemade cider is much more earthy and pungent than the kind that's offered in supermarkets and even though the season is short, the golden liquid is worth its flavor alone.



*John Hailey pumping cider into a barrel*



*A wagon loaded with wooden barrels*



*Fresh squeezed cider ready to sample*



*An autumn staple; tangy apples and homemade cider*



## *Apple Cider Doughnut Recipe*

2 cups apple cider  
3 cups all-purpose flour  
½ cup whole wheat flour  
⅔ cup packed brown sugar  
2 teaspoons baking powder  
¾ teaspoon salt  
½ teaspoon baking soda  
¼ teaspoon each ground cardamom,  
nutmeg, cinnamon and allspice  
2 large eggs, room temperature  
6 tablespoons butter, melted and cooled  
Oil for deep-fat frying

### **Directions**

In a small saucepan, bring cider to rapid boil; cook over high heat until reduced by half,

about 12 minutes. Cool completely. Whisk together flours, brown sugar, baking powder, salt, baking soda and spices. In a separate bowl, whisk eggs, melted butter and cooled cider; stir into dry ingredients just until moistened (dough will be sticky). Refrigerate, covered until firm enough to shape, about one hour. Divide dough in half. On a floured surface, pat each portion to ½ inch thickness; cut with a floured 3-inch doughnut cutter. In an electric skillet or deep fryer, heat oil to 325. Fry doughnuts, a few at a time, until golden brown, 2-3 minutes on each side. Fry doughnut holes, a few at a time, until golden brown and cooked through, about one minute on each side. Drain on paper towels; cool slightly. If desired, dip doughnuts into a glaze or sugar of your choice. Yield: 1 dozen doughnuts plus the holes.