

What's in Season from the Garden State

Biweekly Highlights from Cooperative Extension, a unit of Rutgers New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station

October 14, 2009



Potato varieties developed for the northeast get tested in Rutgers NJAES research trials for New Jersey. Top photo: The Adirondack Blue (dark purple) and Lehigh (light yellow) are on the market in the northeast, but some of the other test varieties have exciting names like "NYD34-003" (purple line) until they are launched commercially and then renamed.

Tater Tips

When storing potatoes at home, they do best in a cool, dark, dry and humid place – 40 – 50°F is good for short term storage (up to a month), while keeping potatoes in a kitchen cupboard is okay for a week or two.

Of the blue colored varieties, it is best to bake or microwave them to maintain the color. Since the pigment is water soluble, it will be lost if boiled, although this is not the case for yellow potatoes.

RUTGERS
New Jersey Agricultural
Experiment Station

Let's Talk Taters

So Many Potato Varieties – What's the Difference?

It's fall and as the days get shorter and cooler, what could be more comforting than a dish of hot steamy potatoes? When we visit the supermarkets or farm markets with *Jersey Fresh* potatoes, some are big, some are small, some are red, white, yellow or even blue. But what are these big/small/red/white/yellow/blue potatoes good for – baking, mashing, boiling, frying? Potatoes, just like apples, come in many different varieties, but unlike apples, are not usually sold by variety name. An advantage of the up close and personal ambiance of farm markets is that you can ask what kinds of potatoes they are selling and what they can be used for. Cornell University Extension has developed a guide of potato varieties that are grown in the northeast and what they can be used for, flavor and texture descriptions and how they hold up after boiling. You can access the guide on Rutgers NJAES website at: http://njveg.rutgers.edu/assets/pdfs/variety-trials/Potato_Culinary%20Use_Guide_10-Cornell%20.pdf. Dr. Mel Henninger, Rutgers NJAES Extension Specialist in Vegetables, notes that of the varieties on the chart, those that are grown in New Jersey are Superior, Katahdin, Reba, Yukon Gold, Chieftain, and Dark Red Norland.

While Cornell's potato research program develops potato varieties that grow well in the northeast, Rutgers NJAES program tests these varieties to see how they grow under New Jersey conditions. Rutgers research farms in both north and south Jersey are used for potato trials since there are different growing conditions in the northern and southern regions of the state.

Don't Eat Green Potatoes – Fact or Fiction?

Most consumers have heard the warnings that green potatoes are poisonous – but how could a staple/comfort food cause us harm? Dr. Henninger explains that white potatoes are actually plant *stems*, not *roots* (sweet potatoes, however actually are roots). Just like any stem when exposed to light, the potato stems turn green, while at the same time developing bitter alkaloids which are toxic. So, if you see green potatoes at the store, don't buy them and try to avoid buying potatoes exposed to light. (Note: it is harder to detect the green coloration on dark skinned varieties.) Your best bet is buying potatoes in paper bags (plastic bags allow light through). *Jersey Fresh* white potatoes come in five pound paper bags with mesh windows (which should be face down to keep out the light).

2009 – Irish Potato Famine Disease had Minimal Impact on NJ Potato Crops

In 2009 the Irish Potato Famine plant disease pathogen affected the northeast and other regions of the country – affecting both tomato and potato crops. Many tomato crops were lost this summer – both in gardens and farms, although some tomato farmers were able to keep it at bay with preventive measures. Potatoes were affected to a lesser degree. The strain of the plant pathogen was more harmful to tomatoes than potatoes, and since not as many home gardens have potato crops as tomatoes, home gardens did not serve as a conduit to spread the disease amongst potatoes.

Despite the threat of disease, Dr. Henninger notes that the cool wet summer season provided good growing conditions for potatoes, which do well when night time temperatures stay below 70°F. So, when you're out at a farm market picking pumpkins, pick up some potatoes, rev up your ovens, and get baking!

See next article on page 2

New Jersey Department of
Agriculture's Jersey Fresh &
Seafood Availability Report



Apples
Arugula
Beets
Cabbage
Cilantro
Collards
Cranberries
Cucumbers
Dandelions
Dill
Eggplant
Escarol & Endive
Kale
Leeks
Lettuces
Parsley
Peppers
Radishes
Spinach
Squash
Sweet Corn
Swiss Chard
Tomatoes
Turnips
White Potatoes

Bluefish
Bunker (Menhaden)
Fluke
Mackerel, Spanish
Sea Scallops (Day Boat)
Swordfish
**Farm Raised
Hard Clams &
Oysters**
Littlenecks/Middle-necks
Cherrystones,
Chowders, Top-necks
Cape May Salt
Oysters
Delaware Bay
Oysters

Melick's Town Farm - Tewksbury
Pochuck Valley Farm - Glenwood
Mood's Farm Market - Mullica Hill
Everitt's Fruit Farm - Lafayette
Hacklebarney Farm - Chester
Wightman Farm - Morristown
Delicious Orchards - Colts Neck
Best's Fruit Farm - Hackettstown
Fralinger's - Bridgeton
Race Farm - Blairstown
Terhune Orchards - Princeton
Colin's Apple Pit - Branchville

Cider House Rules

The leaves are just beginning to turn, pumpkins and mums are popping up on doorsteps and baskets of apples line farmstand shelves. Along with apple season comes an autumn favorite: apple cider. Toast the season with a glass of cold cider and some ginger snap cookies, or a mug of hot spiced cider and a slice of pumpkin bread.

While you can find jugs of commercial cider in many retail establishments, there are a number of New Jersey cider makers, so it's worth seeking out *Jersey Fresh* apple cider. Local cider makers distinguish their product by using their own special blend of apples, which provide a distinct flavor to their cider.

In New Jersey, wholesale cider makers are required to follow federal food safety guidelines which require either pasteurization or ultraviolet treatment of the cider to kill pathogens. According to Alan Talarsky of the Food and Drug Safety Program of the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services, which licenses and inspects wholesale cider makers, the two contaminants of concern are E. coli, a pathogen, and patulin, a toxin produced by mold.

The prevention of mold entering the cider starts early in the cider process. Cider makers are encouraged to use tree-harvested apples, as opposed to apples which have dropped from the tree. After apples are harvested, they are sorted to eliminate any rotted apples. Sanitation to prevent E. coli contamination is required in all the processing steps – from employee hygienic requirements to bottling requirements. Before pressing, harvested apples are stored in a cooler and washed with a food grade sanitizer. During pressing, pulp and juice are mixed together and filtered for large particles. If the cider is pasteurized, it is heated between 160 and 180°F for several seconds. Most treated cider in New Jersey is exposed to UV light, rather than pasteurized – both processes achieve similar rates of killing bacteria. After bottling and labeling, cider is kept refrigerated.

Bill Tietjen, Agricultural Agent for Rutgers NJAES, notes that some people claim they can taste the difference between UV and pasteurized ciders, while Tietjen suspects that the unique cider blends of cider makers are more the flavor differences that are detected. While the wholesale cider makers are required by law to treat their cider with pasteurization of UV light, cider makers that sell retail only through direct markets like farm markets are not required to treat their cider. They are inspected by local health departments and must have a statement on the label identifying the cider as untreated.

No Need to Mull it Over – Top Reasons for Buying Jersey Fresh Cider

- Cider is a seasonal item made from fresh local apples. It is available in stores from early fall and disappears from store shelves as the season wanes.
- The apples are grown and processed locally. Most orchards have a processing building located at the orchard. *Jersey Fresh* cider doesn't have to travel far to get to New Jersey consumers.
- How many juices can you serve hot or cold? Drink it up straight from the fridge or spice it up – warmed with a few quick shakes of cinnamon, nutmeg and cloves, or a more detailed mulled cider recipe.
- Cider is part of our colonial heritage. During the 1700 and 1800's an essential component of many New Jersey farms was the apple orchard. Jersey cider had its own reputation. While shipped predominately to New York, large quantities of cider were also shipped to Southern States.
- New Jersey cider is as renowned today as in old times from farmers who grow apples and press cider. Each farmer uses a consistent distinctive blend of varieties, leading to a recognizable taste. Families who seek out farm-made cider develop preferences for their favorite blend.

Wholesale New Jersey cider makers are listed in the left column. There are also retail New Jersey cider makers that sell in direct markets. Look for *Jersey Fresh* cider at your favorite market.

Where to find Jersey Fresh? Ask for it where you shop or dine or go to:
<http://www.jerseyfresh.nj.gov>

To receive these reports by e-mail:
njfarmfresh@njaes.rutgers.edu
Web: <http://www.njfarmfresh.rutgers.edu>
For your county Rutgers Cooperative Extension office go to:
<http://www.njaes.rutgers.edu/county>