Harvest the Fall Fun

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While some may not be perfect, apples are ready for picking at local orchards. Pumpkins did not fare so well in the wet weather and farmers are unsure whether a good crop will rise from the wet fields. However, local farms are open for business with mazes, pick-your-own, cider, doughnuts, pies, hayrides and other autumn fun.

Local apples ripe for picking

By KATIE BRENZEL
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Brisk weather, apple cider, pumpkins primed for jack-o’-lantern grins. And each step outside translates to a colorful crunch.

If you are looking for a quintessential autumn experience, Sussex County is a great place to be. Local farms feature pick-your-own apples and pumpkins, various mazes, hayrides, as well as homemade pastries and ciders.

Depending on when you venture to the apple fields, different types of apples will be available. For instance, Pochuk Valley Farms in Glenwood, which has approximately 30 varieties of apples, has Jonathan apples from Sept. 1 to Oct. 31, but Rhode Island Greenings from Sept. 1 to Oct. 10, according to its website.

Most apples are hand-eating friendly, but vary in color, texture and taste. Both tart apples like Gravensteins and sweet apples such as Red Delicious can be used for apple pies, for instance. People who don’t want to add a lot of sugar to their recipes tend to use sweet, rather than tart apples for baking, according to Diane Sartell, baker and seller at Pochuck.

Certain apples remain more solid when heated, while others turn into a more of a sauce. When baking and eating raw, it all comes down to preference.

“All apples you can basically use for everything. It all depends on your taste,” Sartell said. Whether you are planning to bake your loot into a pie or eat it right from the tree, be sure to ask what's ready to pick and what best suits your purpose.

The best time to go apple picking, according to Rena Bast, co-owner of Beemerville Orchard in Sussex, is from the end of September to the beginning of October. During this

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time, the most apple varieties are ripe for the taking. Beemerville Orchard has 10 to 15 varieties available at a time until late October or early November, depending on the weather.

Pre-picked pumpkins are usually sold at the farmstand, but Bast said she is unsure how many pumpkins will be available, as the recent weather has proved detrimental to the crops.

Though Windy Brow Farms in Newton usually has pick-your-own pumpkins by the first week of October, owner Jim Hunt said he is unsure if and when the pumpkins will be ready.

However, the farm will have its 36 varieties of apples available, “As late into the season as Mother Nature will allow,” according to Hunt., which is usually the third week of October to the beginning of November. Wagon rides to and from the orchard are offered on the weekends.

Whether picking pumpkins in the name of decor or you have pastry ambitions, a number of farms in the area have patches and activities perfect for a fall-themed day.

For instance, Heaven Hill Farms in Vernon hosts a fall festival featuring hayrides, carnival rides, mazes and more. This weekend, the farm is featuring the What the Hay contest, which features hay sculptures.

Check out some of the local pick-your-own farms and orchards:

**Apples and Pumpkins**
- **Windy Brow Farms**
  359 Ridge Road, Newton
  973-579-9657
  Dates: Apples, no until October or November; pumpkins, first week in October
  Hours: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
  Baked on site: pies, doughnuts.

- **Pochuk Valley Farms**
  962 Route 517, Glenwood
  973-764-4732
  Dates: Now through October 31
  Hours: Daily, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.
  Baked on site: pies, cookies, breads, doughnuts

- **Beemerville Orchard**
  73 Lusscroft Road, Sussex
  973-875-1029
  Dates: September to late October/early November
  Hours: Monday to Saturday, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.

- **Valley View Farms**
  290 Route 206 South, Newton
  973-579-7271
  Dates: Now until picked out.
  Hayrides on weekends in October.
  Hours: Daily, 9:30 a.m. to 8 p.m.

- **Heaven Hill Farms**
  449 Route 94, Vernon
  973-764-5144
  Dates: Mid-September through October; hayrides to pumpkin patch on weekends
  Hours: Weekdays, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; weekends, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.
  Baked on site: pies, danish, doughnuts, pastries. Hay and corn mazes.

- **Sussex County Strawberry Farm**
  Highway 206, Andover
  973-579-5055
  Dates: Opens first week in October; hayrides, pony rides on weekends
  Hours: Monday to Saturday, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.; Sunday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

- **Ideal Farms**
  222 Route 15, Lafayette
  973-579-3893
  Dates: last weekend in September to last week in October
  Hours: Weekends, hayrides run 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.
  Baked on site: doughnuts, pies, breads, muffins Mazes: Hay

- **Lentini**
  251 Route 94 South
  973-579-2424
  Dates: Sept. 24 to Oct. 30
  Hours: Saturday, 10 to 7 p.m.; Sunday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.; starting Sept.30, Fridays 5 to 10 p.m.
  Mazes: Corn maze, day and night (Bring a flashlight!) Haunted hay ride, hay maze., Has pumpkins.

*Note, in some cases, store hours differ from you-pick hours. Call location for specifics.

A listing of pick-your-own farms can be found at www.sussexcountyfarmvisits.com.
Preserve the season’s harvest? Yes, you ‘can’

By KATIE BRENZEL kbrenzel@njherald.com

Even if you don’t harvest a backyard garden, it’s possible to put a personal touch on the food on your kitchen table.

Can some peaches to enjoy in the middle of winter, freeze some green beans for a future side dish or pickle some cucumbers. Or if you are particularly ambitious, experiment with jams, jellies or salsa.

Though canning may be a lengthy process, the result is well worth the effort, according to Wendy Clausen, manager of Farmside Supplies in Sussex Borough.

“It can be a family ritual,” she said. Based on sales of preserving equipment sold at Farmside, Clausen said she thinks the number of families opting to preserve food has increased over the past few years.

“The home gardens have increased a lot,” she said. “I think a lot of people want to go back to having more natural foods.”

Most fruits and vegetables perish quickly due to high water content. Canning preserves food for longer, can prove cost effective and stores vitamins often lost within days after harvesting the produce. If prepared and stored correctly, canned foods can last approximately a year.

And, to supplement your own canned goods, check out the jams, jellies and relishes for sale at local farmstands and farmer’s markets.

Canning

Start with fresh produce. Mason-style jars are self-sealing, reusable and typically less expensive than metal containers.

- **Sterilize container:** Use detergent and warm water to clean the jars. Then, place jars right-side up in boiling-water canner, filled with warm water one inch above the jar rim, and boil for about 10 minutes.

- **Preparing foods:** Some produce should be peeled prior to canning. Canning liquid is mostly water, but sugar for syrups or salt may be added to be boiled with the water.

- **Packing:** Raw pack. Put cold, raw vegetables into jars and cover with boiling water. Pack most raw vegetables (except for starchy ones) firmly into the jars. Loosely pack starchy vegetables such as corn, peas and lima beans, because they expand during processing.

- **Heat pack:** Heat vegetables in water or steam before packing. Then cover with the boiling cooking liquid or water. Loosely pack the hot food.

- **Remove excess air:** Place a plastic spatula or similar utensil between the jar and the food. Turn the jar and move the spatula up and down, releasing any air bubbles. Seal the jar.

- **Process:** Processing foods requires either a pressure canner or boiling-water canner.

- **Store:** The best storage temperature for canned foods is between 50 and 70 degrees Fahrenheit. Anything above this temperature promotes growth of bacteria.

- **Beware:** Botulism. If the lid is swelled or no longer concave, the food may be compromised. Open or leaking containers should be boiled 30 minutes before disposing. Unnatural odors, cotton-like growth or spurting liquid are tell-tale signs of spoilage.

Freezing

Generally, packaging material should be durable, moisture/oil/grease resistant and easy to seal, such as plastic freezer bags or heavy-weight aluminum may also be used.

- **Blanch:** Scald vegetables in steam or hot water for short period of time. Different vegetables require different blanching times. For instance, artichoke hearts should be blanched for seven minutes, while celery requires three.

- **Cool:** Plunge vegetables into cool water immediately after blanching. Drain, then air cool.

- **Serve:** Frozen foods can last indefinitely if stored properly. Once

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the food begins to thaw, it must be served.

**Pickling**

- **Select food:** Dill pickles are a favorite. Be sure to weigh the fruit or vegetable prior to beginning in order to determine the amount of brine (vinegar and canning or pickling salt solution) suitable for your food. Fruit pickles are often boiled with sugar and acidified with lemon juice or vinegar. White or cider vinegars (with five percent acidity) are recommended for fruits.
- **Process:** with boiling-water canner.
- **Ferment:** In the refrigerator, dills about take three weeks to ferment. Other pickles are brined for a few hours or overnight, depending. Check recipes for specifics.

**Jams/Jelly**

- **Select fruit:** Fresh, ripe fruit is best. Fruits such as apples, crab apples, gooseberries and grapes usually contain enough natural pectin to form a gel, while low-in-pectin fruits such as strawberries, cherries and blueberries, need to be combined with other fruits high in pectin or with pectin products.
- **Additional ingredients:** Sugar and lemon juice.
- **For jelly:** extract juice. Wash fruits, leaving the skins and cores. For berries remove caps and stems. Place fruit in a flat-bottomed saucepan, and bring to a boil. Stir and gradually decrease heat. Then, place fruit in a jelly bag, and strain the juices into a bowl. Bring extracted juice, sugar and lemon juice to boil. Follow recipe, then fill sterile jars.
- **For jam:** Wash fruit and remove stems, skins and cores. For berries, remove stems and caps and crush. Bring fruit and other ingredients to boil.
- **Process:** jams and jellies in water-boiling canner.
- **Storage and use:** Like other canned goods, jams can be kept in a cool, dry place for about a year. However, once opened, the spread should be used within a month.


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**What to do with all those apples**

What to do after apple picking?

Eat an apple, of course!

Apples can also be made into applesauce or apple jelly.

Or try this recipe, submitted to the New Jersey Herald by Jean Nolan of Lake Wallkill.

**Apple streudel**

Makes three loaves

- 1 cup cold butter or margarine
- 2 cups all purpose flour
- 1 cup (8 oz) sour cream
- 1/4 teaspoon salt

**Filling**

- 2 cups dry bread crumbs
- 1/4 cup butter or margarine
- 4 medium baking apples, peeled and chopped
- 2 cups sugar
- 1 cup golden raisins
- 1/2 cup chopped pecans
- 2 teaspoons ground cinnamon

Confectioner’s sugar, optional

In a medium bowl cut butter into flour until mixture resembles course crumbs.

Add the sour cream and salt, mix well.

Shape into a ball, cover and refrigerate overnight.

For filling, combine the bread crumbs and butter, add apple, sugar, raisins, pecans and cinnamon.

Mix well and set aside.
Divide dough into thirds. Turn onto a floured surface, roll each into a 15-by-12-inch rectangle.

Spoon filling evenly onto dough. Spread to within one inch of edges, roll up from one long side, pinch seams and ends to seal carefully.

Place seam side down on an ungreased baking sheet.

Bake at 350 degrees for 55 to 60 minutes or until light brown.

Cool completely on wire racks, dust with confectioner’s sugar if desired.

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**Award Winning Wines**

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**Westfall Winery**

Westfall Winery is located in Montague on a picturesque farm that has been family owned and operated for more than 70 years. They specialize in fine red, white and Jersey fruit wines. Westfall Winery is a popular Sussex County hot spot where you can enjoy free tastings and attend great seasonal events in their pet-friendly picnic pavilion.

[www.westfallwinery.com](http://www.westfallwinery.com)

**Ventimiglia Vineyard**

Located in Wantage, Ventimiglia continues a family tradition of making hand-crafted wines that has been passed down for generations. Wines are made in small batches with carefully selected top quality grapes.

[www.ventivines.com](http://www.ventivines.com)

**Cava Winery**

The word “cava” is Italian for “cave” so it was only fitting for this winery, located in Hamburg, with its strong history of mining, to choose “Cava” for its name. With the respect for the history of agriculture in the community and the desire to bring something of their heritage here to the community, they create award-winning wines.

[www.cavawinery.com](http://www.cavawinery.com)

We offer something special to our visitors with Wine Trail Events throughout the year.
Join us for samples of our award-winning wines and various other activities!
Community, backyard gardens saw some success this year

BY MEGHAN GILL
For the Herald

Zucchini, cabbage, Swiss chard, cucumbers were harvested this year at local community gardens, which are gardens shared by those who benefit from the bounty.

Other crops were disappointing, as growing conditions were rough all summer, topped by a hurricane and tropical storm that put some fields under water.

Jim Klose, manager of Roseville community garden in Byram, said “Our garden is in its second year of operation, and this year was a challenge. It’s been a great year for lettuce and weeds.”

He said the most successful crops were cucumbers, zucchini, cabbage, and Swiss chard. Eggplant, peppers and tomatoes were disappointing.

“It’s a mixed season. It’s not as easy to garden with weeds. Many of our gardeners are first-year gardeners,” he said. Roseville Community Garden is a one-acre garden with 15x15-foot plots. Membership is $30 per year. The garden was started two years ago from land donated by Peter Kellogg, billionaire benefactor/philanthropist.

Linda Grinthal, owner of Sunset View Farms in Andover, a community supported garden, said her garden suffered minimal damage during the storms that ushered in the end of summer.

“We were really blessed with very little damage.” They did lose their sunflower crop, but are “making the best of it and using the seeds before the birds get them,” she said.

The reason her farm had so little damage was due in part to the covers and preparation of the plants before Hurricane Irene struck. “We had a lot of wind. We have an open field, but everything seems good.”

“We have a lot to be thankful for.” Smadar English, long-term farmer at Genesis farm in Blairstown, a community supported garden, said.

“Things have been really good. The shares have been bountiful; just today, we harvested 600 pounds of tomatoes.”

Corn, however, was lost, which was the saddest aspect of the storms and rain.

Genesis grows crops on about 25 acres, and leases an additional 50 acres from the Sisters of St. Dominic. They also received a gift of 70 acres from a member, located adjacent to the main grown acreage.

English believes the crops survived the storm largely to its raised beds.

“If we didn’t have the raised beds, we would have been in trouble. After hurricane Floyd 11 years ago, we rearranged the contours of our beds to minimize water problems. We made hills on each side, berms, to direct water across the field instead of downhill.”

Patrick Kenah, of Fredon, said his backyard garden yield has been mixed. Kenah planted five varieties of tomatoes this season.

“My tomatoes have been pretty bad. I have a lot on the vine; but my New Jersey variety have splits in them. Compared to last year, the tomatoes were a disappointment.”

He had a bumper crop of cucumbers and broccoli. Eggplant was a “complete failure.”

Kenah said last year, he had an overabundance of eggplant and had to put some out at the side of the road for neighbors.
Local vineyards ready with taste of autumn

BY JEFF SISTRUNK
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Summer’s end may be upon Sussex County, but residents can look forward to staying warm inside this fall with a nice glass of wine, as local vineyards and wineshops roll out new blends and seasonal specialties.

Westfall Winery in Montague is producing an apple cinnamon wine, which will be featured at its Oktoberfest event the first weekend in October, said co-owner Georgene Mortimer. Following a “good” harvest, the winery is also putting out a “Skylands Blush” blend manufactured from Concord and Niagara grapes grown at the vineyard, as well as a Spanish Passion sangria, which is a mix of Leon Millot and Marechal Foch grapes and orange and blueberry wines. A dry Rhone red blend that netted the winery a Double Gold award at a Finger Lakes competition will also be featured, Mortimer said.

Anthony Ventimiglia, who runs the vineyard at Ventimiglia Vineyards in Wantage, encouraged visitors to come out between now and mid-November, as employees will be in the process of making wine.

Ventimiglia Vineyards recently released a 2010 chardonnay that was made from grapes sourced out of Warren County and bottle-aged for 6 months. The vineyard specializes in dry red and white wines and sells its product at the Sparta Farmer’s Market, Ventimiglia said.

“IT’s like a European-style wine-making process,” he said. “We try to keep well-balanced wines. We do a lot of blending.”

George’s Wine Gallery in Branchville is hosting twin tasting events on Oct. 15, one in-store and the other at the Farmer’s Market building at the Sussex County Fairgrounds.

The in-store tasting will feature an international wine selection plus local produce and meats, said co-owner Frances Delgado. Photography from Branchville-based photographer Michal Frank will be on display, and a jazz group is slated to perform from 6 to 9 p.m.

At the all-day fairgrounds tasting, which George’s Wine Gallery is hosting in conjunction with Pennington’s Hopewell Valley Vineyards, only New Jersey wines will be featured, alongside peach and apple ciders.

Cava Winery in Hardyston, features several wines whose grapes were harvested in the fall, with the wine aged for 12 months.

Local vineyards will host wine tastings through the fall.

Where to find fresh, local foods

There are still plenty of crops being harvested and farmer’s markets will continue to offer locally grown produce through the end of October.

Farmer’s markets and local farmstands are offering not only fresh produce but meats, breads, eggs, jams, jellies, pies, soaps, cheese, relish and pickles, and honey among other items.

Sparta Farmer’s Market
65 Main St., Sparta Municipal Building parking lot, Sparta
Open Saturdays, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. through Oct. 29,

Olde Lafayette Village Farmer’s Market
75 State Highway 15
Sundays, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. to Oct. 30

Branchville Farmer’s Market
Thursdays, 3-7 p.m.
(weather permitting)
At the park on Wantage Avenue.
Through the end of October.

If you see a vegetable or fruit you never saw before, ask the farmer about it!

Blairstown Farmer’s Market
Saturdays, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. through Oct. 29
Route 521 (Stillwater Road)
Blairstown
(Next to Agway and the Blairstown Fire Department.

Hackettstown Downtown Farmer’s Market
Mondays from 2 to 7 p.m. in the Moore Street Parking Lot, behind Stella Gas on Main Street, through October.

Sussex County Farmer’s Market at the Fairgrounds
37 Plains Road, Barn Building, Augusta, Saturdays, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. through Oct. 29

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