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SPORTS

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Cider houses rule in New England

By Neece Regis | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT SEPTEMBER 06, 2014



NECEE REGIS FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

You can pick your own apples and sample cider at Bear Swamp Orchard & Cidery in Ashfield.

When crisp weather arrives in New England, this traveler's thoughts turn to all things fall, such as brilliant foliage, pumpkin patches, and cider made from local apples.

ASHFIELD, Mass.

Steve and Jen Gougeon grow certified organic apples at **Bear Swamp Orchard & Cidery**, the site of an orchard dating back more than 100 years. Committed to a holistic approach to growing, the couple steers clear of broad-spectrum pesticides while cultivating 50 varieties of

apples on the 12-acre farm.

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With a 20-year history of home-brewing and fermenting hard cider, the Gougeons have experimented and produced many varieties including Howes (“sweet, bitter, good acidity, a great cider apple”), Dandeneau (“low acid, nice astringency, great sugars), and Harrison, an old American cidering apple they are trying to bring back from the edge of extinction. They grow and pick all the fruit used in their ciders, then press, ferment, and bottle it all on the farm.

All ciders are made with organic ingredients, including hops, honey, maple syrup, and wild yeast to produce an unfiltered, unpasteurized product that contains no sulfites. From September to mid-October, visitors can pick their own apples, or enjoy a hard cider tasting. They also sell sweet cider, raw vinegar, jams, jellies, maple syrup, and baked goods.

413-625-2849, www.bearswamporchard.com

RICHMOND, Mass.



NECEE REGIS FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

At Hilltop Orchards in Richmond, Mass. you can pick your own apples on the 200-acre property, and taste cider and wine at the Farm Winery Store.

True to its name, **Hilltop Orchards** provides a scenic view of the colorful fall foliage in the Berkshire Hills. The Vittori family has farmed this historic apple orchard, a 200-acre property, for 25 years, and welcomes visitors for apple picking, hiking, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing. In apple-picking season, families enjoy free hayrides up to the orchard to pick their own fruit.



The farm produces more than 24 varieties of apples, including the well-known Cortland, Empire, Fuji, McIntosh, Macoun, and Red Delicious, as well as many heritage varieties that have been preserved and propagated for more than 100 years, such as the Golden Russet, Milton, and Rhode Island Greening.

Hilltop Orchards is also home to the Garden Gables Inn and Furnace Brook Winery where, in addition to wine, they produce a French-style cider, a Johnny Mash hard cider made from estate-grown apples, and apple ice wine. Stop by the Farm Winery Store for wines and ciders, apple and other fruit pies, scones, cider doughnuts, preserves, maple syrup, and more. *Open daily, year-round, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. 800-833-6274, www.hilltoporchards.com*

GLEN, N.H.

You can't pick apples at the **White Mountain Cider Co.**, but you can watch them being pressed (and taste a sample) every weekend from mid-September through early December. Owned by Culinary Institute of America graduates Teresa and Scott Stearns, the mill purchases apples from a local orchard, then washes, grinds, and presses them to produce an unpasteurized cider made without additives.

The property includes a large, old red barn that houses a country store and deli where you can enjoy cold cider, hot cider, and cider doughnuts, plus sandwiches and other local specialty

items, year-round.

Stay for dinner in the Cider Co. restaurant, featuring seasonally changing, contemporary New England cuisine in a restored 1880s farmhouse. House cocktails include apple-theme libations such as Ciderini, Long Hello (apple brandy, elderflower liqueur, whiskey barrel-aged bitters, cider, Prosecco, nutmeg), and Cider Company Beer Cocktail (Peak's Nut Brown Ale, Laird's applejack, cider reduction, lemon). 603-383-4414, www.ciderconh.com



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At Hilltop Orchards in Richmond, Mass. you can pick your own apples on the 200-acre property, and taste cider and wine at the Farm Winery Store.

WATERBURY CENTER, Vt.

Located along Route 100 in central Vermont, between Waterbury and Stowe, the **Cold Hollow Cider Mill** produces sweet cider year-round. The production facility is a popular attraction, drawing visitors by the busload to view cider being made with the rack and cloth method on a 1920-vintage press. Especially busy in the fall, the mill processes two tractor-trailer loads of tree-picked, hand-selected apples each day.

Founding owners Eric and Francine Chittenden, descendants of Vermont's first governor, began making apple cider for friends in 1974.

Today, new mill owners Gayle and Paul Brown estimate they press about 7.5 million apples each year, blending Macintosh (80 percent) with Cortland, Empire, Delicious, Rome, Spartan, Niagara, and other varieties from Champlain Valley orchards. They flash-pasteurize the cider by rapidly heating to 172 degrees and then quickly cooling to 36 degrees.

You can observe the process (or watch a video about it) and then sample fresh-pressed cider from the tank. In winter and summer, the press operates three to four days a week; from mid-September through mid-December, it is working every day. Small group and family tours are self-guided and are open to the public (8 a.m.-6 p.m. November-June; 8 a.m.-7 p.m. June-October); no reservations are needed for self-guided tour.

After touring the facility, stop by the vintage mill and stock up on cider and other Vermont specialty foods including jellies, mustards, cider doughnuts, apple pies, pumpkin rolls, maple butter, maple syrup, and more.

In the Honey Corner, watch live bees — traditional pollinators of the orchards in the spring — make honey behind glass.

Across the driveway, the Apple Core Luncheonette & Brew serves a variety of lunch options daily along with local brews and hard ciders. 800-327-7537, www.coldhollow.com

AMESBURY, Mass.

In the rolling hills of northern Essex County, the 145-acre **Cider Hill Farm** produces cider made from a blend of seven to 12 varieties of apples. The farm is owned and operated by three generations of the Cook family, which prides itself on producing cider that is never heated, pasteurized, UV treated, or chemically preserved or altered. At the busiest point in their season — mid-September to mid-October — they press one day a week and can make up to 1,300 gallons.

On certain days, visitors can observe apples being sorted and graded before being chopped and fed into the press. The farm grows more than 65 varieties of apples that are available in the Farm Store, a restored, 150-year-old dairy barn where you'll also find freshly baked apple

cider doughnuts, fruit pies, tea breads, muffins, breads, and pastries. House-made honey uses nectar gathered from millions of flowers within a 2-mile radius of the farm. (You can watch bees produce honey in the live bee observatory.) In addition, you'll find locally tapped maple syrup, jams, jellies, apple butter, and crisp mixes, as well as specialty meats and cheeses, and lots of crafts and gift items created by local artisans.

If you prefer to do the picking, call to check the crop schedule for pick-your-own apples as well as strawberries, blueberries, raspberries, peaches, plums, nectarines, and pumpkins. The farm is open seven days a week through Nov. 26. 978-388-5525, www.ciderhill.com



NECEE REGIS FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

You can pick your own apples and sample cider at Bear Swamp Orchard & Cidery in Ashfield, Mass.

GUILFORD/NORTHFORD, Conn.

Owned and operated by six generations of Bishops since the late 19th century, **Bishop's Orchards** grow apples, pears, blueberries, peaches, pears, strawberries, raspberries, asparagus, and vegetables on 320 acres of land.

Apples, refrigerated immediately after harvest, are inspected, brushed, washed, and then ground up and pumped into a stainless steel press with nylon press cloths. The cider is

pasteurized, refrigerated, and ready for purchase from early September until June in the 2,000-square-foot retail Farm Market & Winery in Guilford.

Open year round, the market also sells fresh fermented and lightly bubbly New England Style Hard Cider, and Golden Hard Cider (made from 100-percent Golden Delicious apples), both produced at nearby Bishop's Orchards Winery. Apple cider doughnuts, fruit pies, muffins, cookies, fudge, banana, applesauce, zucchini breads, and other baked goods are made daily. Fresh produce, jams, honey, cheese, nuts, and more are also available.

At the Northford Farm location, apples are available for picking on weekends only from mid-August to late October. Bags are provided at no cost, and a tractor ride transports you from the parking area into the orchard. Check out the 24-hour phone information line, 203-458-PICK, for daily updates during the picking season. 203-453-2338, www.bishopsorchards.com

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0 COMMENTS