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The new look of temptation

With apple season in full swing, plant breeders near montreal are excited about a new hybrid that doesn't discolour when cut

JULIAN ARMSTRONG

The Gazette

Wednesday, September 28, 2005

Imagine, as you enjoy Quebec's extra-sweet 2005 apple crop, cutting open an apple that will not turn that sallow, yellowish brown.

This could be a reality in four or five years' time, thanks to the development of a new Quebec apple now being tested. A small crop of them crowd trees in a federal research orchard south of Montreal. The talk of the apple industry, these round, red, good-tasting apples are for now known only by a number, although the fruit scientist in charge is open to name suggestions.

Other new, improved apples are also in our future, thanks to federal plant breeders. How about a McIntosh that stays fresh in your

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CREDIT: PIERRE OBENDRAUF, THE GAZETTE

At a federal research orchard near St. Jean sur Richelieu, Shahrohk Khanizadeh holds apples he had cut two days earlier. The one at right is the new, unnamed variety.

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refrigerator for nine months? Or a yellow apple like the French Reinette and better than the Golden Russet? Or a new Gala specifically geared to Quebec weather?

A good crop of extra-sweet apples is pouring onto the market after a hot, sunny summer and warm fall. Growers, hoping for some chilly nights to colour up the fruit, are forecasting reasonable prices, particularly for bagged apples.

"When it's sunny, apples build up more sugar," said Dean Thompson, an apple grower from St. Paul d'Abbotsford.

Together with most growers in eastern North America, Thompson found the weather over the last few months too hot and dry for the apples to grow as large as they did last year. And September heat and wind has been causing a considerable number to fall. "We'll have more C-grade apples, which go to make juice," said the grower and former president of the 700-member Federation des producteurs de pommes du Quebec.

The federation is calling this year's crop "normal," with many growers reporting smaller fruit because of the lack of rain. Information officer Diane Allie says growers would welcome a cool snap to improve apple colours. "Apples like cold nights," she said from her Longueuil office.

The reason for the excitement about the new, nameless apple is the fruit's crisp, white flesh and the discovery that it stays that way when cut open.

There's no need to drizzle cut surfaces of this apple with lemon juice to stop it from discolouring. What's more, since it does not fall from the tree but stays on the branch when the weather turns cold, it's a natural for ice cider.

Three Quebec apple growers who make this aperitif have obtained about 20 trees each and are dreaming of harvesting naturally frozen apples. But they will have to wait until permissions and patents are granted in the U.S. as well as Canada, said its inventor, Shahrokh Khanizadeh, a fruit breeder at the St. Jean sur Richelieu orchard run by Agriculture Canada.

A suggestion to call the apple Snow White came from a chemist at the University of Guelph. Khanizadeh, who took us on a tour of his test trees, likes the idea.

"This apple never drops on the snow," he noted.

The apple wasn't actually developed for its non-browning properties, admits Khanizadeh, who teaches at both McGill and Laval universities. About eight years ago, he was cross-breeding various types of apple trees in search of fruit that resists disease and has better than usual shelf life. "But then I cut one of these apples and, a half-hour later, noticed that it stayed white. I



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couldn't believe it," said the scientist.

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The new look of temptation

...Continued

He showed us two cut apples, one a MacSpur (a McIntosh cousin), whose flesh was brown and wrinkled, the other the newcomer, which still looked freshly cut. The apples had been sitting in his laboratory at St. Jean for two days.

The flesh of most apples will turn brown when exposed to air, but the new apple is lower in oxidizing compounds.

The new apple, created using traditional cross-breeding methods, came from crossing two varieties of apple trees: the Jonamac, a New York state variety widely grown in Quebec; and the Linda, an old Ontario variety originally bred in about 1930 but no longer in commercial production.

The apples that appeared on the branches of the scientist's new trees pleased him greatly. They are medium to large size, resembling a McIntosh or Cortland, with skin that's dark red streaked with green. And they're easy to pick because the trees

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CREDIT: PIERRE OBENDRAUF, THE GAZETTE
Shahrohk Khanizadeh used traditional cross-breeding methods to create the new apple. Parent varieties are the Jonamac, a New York state variety widely grown in Quebec, and the Linda, an old Ontario variety.

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hang their branches low, "like a willow tree," noted the scientist, gesturing to the low-dipping branches laden with reddening fruit.

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Growers also like the fact the trees withstand Quebec's severe winters well, the trees and fruit are resistant to mildew, and the fruit doesn't fall off the tree.

This last capacity is a serious advantage; the banned substance alar used to be sprayed on McIntosh apple trees to prevent apples from falling before they were fully ripe, but it only kept them on the tree an extra 10 days, he explained.

The newcomer is a late-season apple, ripening in early October along with the Empire and Cortland. The Cortland, Khanizadeh said, is the only currently cultivated apple that shows less browning than other apples, but he considers the new apple to have more flavour.

The scientist is pleased that his new apple is not genetically modified. Apple breeders at a federal orchard in British Columbia's Okanagan Valley are working on developing an apple that won't turn brown when cut, but, to do this, they are trying to transfer a gene into the Gala variety. They plan to make the trees available next year.

The fast food chain McDonald's is watching the development of these new, non-browning apples with interest, with the idea of serving them cut-up in their children's meals, Khanizadeh said.

Licensing procedures for the new apple are holding up sales of the trees to growers. The necessary Canadian Plant Breeder's Right has been acquired, and a U.S. patent has been applied for, but it may be some months before the U.S. patent is granted, he said. A group of 50 Quebec agricultural scientists are scheduled to visit the research orchard to study the new apples.

"I have about a thousand trees ready, but we're not letting them out," Khanizadeh said.

The next stage is for nurseries to buy the trees, breed others, then sell them to apple growers. Once the trees are planted, it takes four to five years for them to produce a crop.

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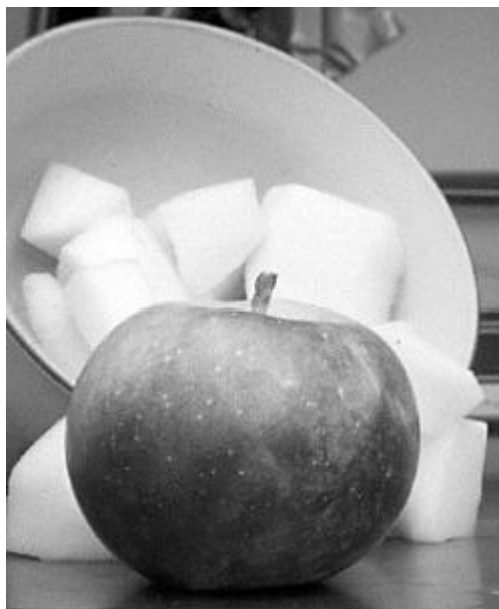
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The new look of temptation

...Continued

If you have a suggestion of a name for the new apple, send it to Shahrohk Khanizadeh by email: khanizadehs@agr.gc.ca.

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The new apple resembles a McIntosh or Cortland.

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Two salads for apple season

An apple that doesn't turn brown when cut would help the look of an apple salad. Until that fruit becomes available, drizzle lemon juice on the cut surfaces to retain their fresh white or cream colour.

Here are two apple salads with which to celebrate apple season:

Salad of Mixed Greens, Apples and Cranberries

Serves 12

Rose Murray, an Ontario food writer, serves this good-looking fall salad with a cider dressing when she gives a party. It's from her cookbook *Hungry for Comfort* (Penguin Canada, 2003, \$28).

Cider dressing:

1/4 cup (50 mL) packed brown sugar

1 tablespoon (15 mL) all-purpose flour

1 teaspoon (5 mL) dry mustard

1/2 teaspoon (2 mL) salt

1 cup (250 mL) milk

1/2 cup (125 mL) cider vinegar

1/2 cup (125 mL) sour cream

Salad:

18 cups (4.5 L) torn, mixed salad greens or mesclun

11/2 cups (375 mL) dried cranberries

1 red onion, thinly sliced

1 cup (250 mL) toasted pecan halves (optional)

4 apples, unpeeled

Cider dressing: In a small saucepan, combine sugar, flour, dry mustard and salt. Gradually stir in milk and vinegar. Bring to a boil over medium-high

heat, stirring constantly. Reduce heat to low and cook, stirring, for two minutes. Let cool, stirring occasionally. (Dressing can be made to this point up to a week ahead.) Whisk in sour cream.

Salad: In a large salad bowl, toss together the salad greens, cranberries, onion and pecans. (Salad can be made to this point four hours ahead, covered with damp tea towels or paper towels and refrigerated.) Core, halve and slice apples thinly and add to salad. Toss with dressing to coat ingredients.

Approximate nutritional content per serving: Calories 145. Protein 2 g. Fat 3 g. Carbohydrates 29 g. Dietary fibre 5 g. Sodium 125 mg.

Apple Fennel Salad

Serves 4

Montreal TV cook Josee di Stasio (A la di Stasio, Friday at 9 p.m., Sunday at 5 p.m., CIVM-17) likes to use fennel in her cooking. This recipe from her cookbook A la di Stasio (Flammarion, 2004, \$39.95) tops off the combination of fennel and apples with parmesan cheese.

2 bulbs fennel

2 firm apples, unpeeled, thinly sliced

1/3 cup (75 mL) extra-virgin olive oil

2 tablespoons (30 mL) fresh lemon juice

Salt and freshly ground pepper

Parmesan cheese shavings

Trim outer leaves and peel surface skin from fennel, then slice thinly across the bulbs with a sharp knife or mandoline. In a wide, shallow bowl, intersperse fennel with apple slices. In a cup, combine oil and lemon juice. Season vinaigrette with salt and pepper and sprinkle over salad. Top with parmesan.

Approximate nutritional content per serving: Calories 250. Protein 4 g. Fat 19 g. Carbohydrates 20 g. Dietary fibre 6 g. Sodium 275 mg.

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