

# autumn apples

With knowledge and support of local and seasonal food on the increase, apple lovers will be delighted to know that Autumn is the season for our native British varieties. And what variety we have. **Lisa Moore-Wilson** tells **flavour** why the apple is such a special fruit.

Tucked away in a forgotten corner of Northumberland is a garden, which is a testament to better times. Apart from a few vegetable patches belonging to the nearby cottages, the old hall's kitchen garden has largely fallen into disrepair. Nature is reclaiming the once carefully tended land, local wildlife enters without fear and only a few precarious panes of glass hang from the derelict old greenhouses but the apple trees stand true. Despite years of neglect, each Autumn sees hundreds of apples from small 'eaters' with a gentle rosy blush to fresh green Bramleys whose branches bend and dip under their weight. One of the cottage gardeners tells me there are over sixty varieties in this small space whose names have nearly disappeared from memory.

It seems astonishing given our rich heritage and the fact that Britain's temperate climate produces the best apples in the world, that we have been reduced to a tiny choice of pre-packaged supermarket varieties, many imported from as far away as New Zealand. However as support for local produce grows, interest in our apple heritage is reviving. Indeed the October Apple Day organised by the Borders Organic Gardeners is one of the most important events in their year. Here people come to learn about growing different varieties as well as how to use them. Schemes such as this are important because restoring these varieties is important not just in terms of our environment but because it restores a richness of flavours we can use in our cooking.

For many of us, Autumn apples are the ultimate comfort food with wholesome crumbles and golden-crust blackberry and apple pies stirring pleasant childhood memories. However apples also make great savoury dishes – after all what can beat a crisp apple and a chunk of sharp cheddar as a snack? Apples also pair well with many meat dishes. Try pheasant simmered in a casserole with heritage variety apples and Peel Walls cider from the Borders. If you can accompany this with home grown roasted potatoes and vegetables even better – there is something about the sum of the parts being greater than the whole that makes a meal from local produce truly satisfying for the soul on a dusky autumn night. ■