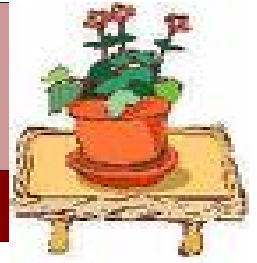


The Children's Corner



By Cathi Cote

September is a true transition month, bridging the gap between the characteristic heat and humidity of August, and the crisp, cool autumn days that are October in New England. At this time of year, summer gardens are beginning to brown and birds and other wildlife are busy collecting treats from burgeoning seed-heads.

The shorter days bring a special treat for us, too. This is the month when apples begin to come into their own. Produce stands and grocery store shelves may be bursting with a tempting display of apples of myriad varieties, but it's far more fun to pick your own! Whether your children are in preschool or high school they will surely enjoy the pick-your-own experience and what better way to spend a few hours together on a bright and sunny September weekend?

Take your excursion one step further by bringing in a little science. How did the trees produce this beautiful fruit? Where did all of the different apple varieties come from? (You can tie these questions to last month's pollinator discussion.) And once you get your harvest home, there are plenty of kid-friendly recipes to help you and your children enjoy the fruits of your labor.

The first step is to find a pick-your-own orchard near you. The arts and entertainment section of your local newspaper can be a good place to start. For a complete listing of Rhode Island farms and orchards that welcome pickers, try the internet. Two websites, in particular, that provide easy-access to pick-your-own information are: www.pickyourown.org/RI.htm, and www.farmfresh.org. Both sites offer links to farms that include directions. (You'll find more than apples here! These sites can also help you plan later fall excursions with the kids to pick-your-own pumpkins or perhaps tackle a corn field maze.)

It's a good idea to pick more than one type of apple: eating and cooking. For example, Gala or McIntosh apples are good choices for fresh snacking because of their sweet flavor, while the firm texture of Baldwin and Macoun apples help them to hold together well when cooked. Regardless of the varieties you choose, the aroma of cooking apples can create a special memory all their own. Below is one cooking suggestion that even very young children can help prepare.

Red Hot Baked Apples

(This also makes a great camp-fire dessert – just wrap the apples in tin foil and bake them on the coals.)

6 apples
1/2 cup packed brown sugar
1/3 cup cinnamon red hot candies
1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon

Preheat your oven to 350 degrees. Lightly grease an 8x8 inch square pan. Remove and reserve the tops of the apples. Core the apples, leaving approximately 1/2 inch of flesh at the bottom. Arrange the apples in the baking dish. In a small bowl, mix together brown sugar, cinnamon red hot candies and cinnamon. Fill each apple with the mixture. Replace the apple tops. Sprinkle the remaining mixture over the apples. Bake uncovered in the preheated oven 30 to 35 minutes, or until apples are tender. For an extra special treat, serve your baked apples with ice cream!

Sharing the rewards of the harvest is just one way to introduce the pleasures of gardening to the children in your life. The little boy who can't wait to climb the apple trees in the orchard that you visit today may tomorrow grow up to be the man who nurtures an orchard in his own back yard. It's all about making memories...on the path to growing a gardener.