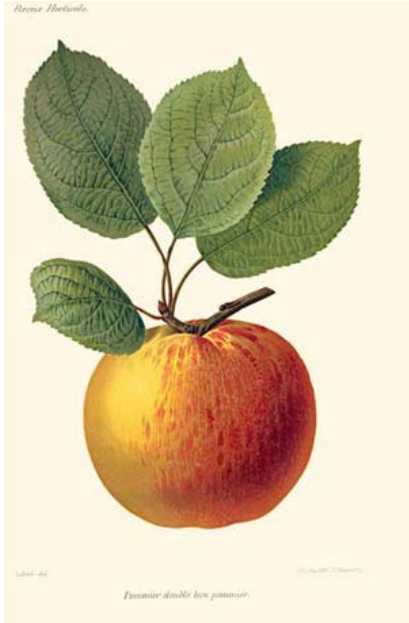


Hard Cider



Forget orange juice. Hard cider is the original breakfast drink. President John Adams used to drink a quart of it before starting his busy day and I'm sure it made him not only more agreeable, but as regular as a Swiss watch too.

Making traditional hard apple cider is easy. You can buy pasteurized apple juice, add yeast, and in a week have an acceptable dry beverage. But making a *great* hard cider is a challenge; arguably even more challenging than making a fine wine.

What's so hard about making a great hard cider? Just as there are particular grape varieties that are mixed to create fine wine, so are there varieties of apples that were bred as hard cider ingredients. But unlike wine, in which winemakers focus on one type of grape, and then add small amounts of others as an accent, cidemakers routinely mix several varieties of apple juice to make a great hard cider. Most, then, are blends.

For the purposes of hard cider, an apple species can be categorized in four ways:

- Sweet apples—Sweet apples that are high in sugar and low in acid. Varieties include Red Delicious, Cortland, Rome Beauty, and York Imperial. These constitute 25 to 50 percent of a hard cider.
- Tart apples—Slightly acidic apples that give zest to the juice. Varieties include Jonathon, Northern Spy, Winesap, and Granny Smith. These make up 25 to 40 percent of a hard cider.
- Aromatic apples—Fragrant apples that contribute to a blend's bouquet. Varieties include Macintosh, Gravenstein, Pippin, Golden Delicious, and Gala. These constitute 10 to 30 percent of a hard cider.
- Astringent apples—Highly acidic apples that also contain tannin. Varieties include crabapples and wild varieties sometimes called "spitters" for obvious reasons. These apples are used in small quantities to give the blend a unique character and also to help preserve it since they have more tannins than other varieties. These make up less than 10 percent of a hard cider.

In the 18th century, when cider making was arguably at its peak, cider makers did their work in the fall. This was when apples were ripe, and perhaps more telling, there was no other fruit available. Today we have a wide variety of juices available year round, so we aren't restricted to using just apples to make cider. But the flavor ratio still holds, so when mixing other fruit juice into your cider, choose juices that have the following profile:

- Sweet juice – Most apple juice works well, 50 percent of the total used
- Tart juice – Citrus juices serve well here; 20 to 25 percent of the total
- Aromatic juice – Stone fruits or berries are a good choice, 20 to 25 percent of the total
- Astringent juice – Cranberry is good in this role, 5 to 10 percent of the total

Balanced Hard Cider

- 1 gallon apple juice (no preservatives)
- 1 quart Knutsens Black Cherry Juice
- 1 quart Knutsen Raspberry Lemonade
- ¼ teaspoon grape tannin (optional)
- 1 teaspoon yeast nutrient (optional)
- 1 packet ale yeast

1. Pour juice, yeast nutrient, and grape tannin into primary fermenter.
2. Add yeast.
3. Fermentation is usually complete in a week to 10 days. You can bottle it, or if you want a sparkling cider, add six teaspoons of corn sugar, then bottle in beer or Champagne-style bottles.
4. Whether you make a still or sparkling cider, you don't need to age it more than a couple of weeks.

Serving Suggestion: Hard cider is similar in character to a light lager and goes especially well with Spanish food or by itself. Serve cold in a pint glass.