

Celebrating Apples

Overview: Apples are a fun fruit to grow, explore, and enjoy. You can grow them yourself, pick them at a local orchard, or buy them at your local farmer’s market or grocery store.

Materials:

- Different varieties of apples
- Plates and knives

Approximate Time to Complete: 1 hour

Location: Indoors or Outdoors

Ages: All ages

Season: Fall is the best for fresh apples, but could potentially be done in any season

There are over 2,500 varieties of apples grown in the United States – that is a lot of apples! A variety (or more properly, cultivar, which comes from “cultivated variety”) is a plant that has been selected by humans for specific characteristics and propagated vegetatively, using grafting, cuttings, or tissue culture to keep plants genetically identical and maintain those desired characteristics. Apple growers select for a wide range of characteristics such as fruit color, taste, ripening date, disease resistance, and winter hardiness.

Another interesting fact about apples is that in order to get fruit, you need for a pollinator to deliver pollen from one variety to another variety. You can’t plant just one apple tree and get fruit. When you plant apple trees, you must plant at least two different varieties of apple, making sure that the bloom times of both varieties overlap, and the trees are planted within 100 feet of each other so that pollinators can successfully complete the transfer of pollen.

Instructions:

1. Hold an apple taste test with your young gardeners to explore the diversity of colors, smells, tastes, and textures of apples! Gather a selection of different varieties of apples, choosing ones with different skin colors and sizes. Wash and dry and then cut into slices for tasting (make sure to keep track of the variety type). You can use a chart like this one to record your observations:

Variety	Color	Size	Smell	Texture	Taste	Rating (1 to 10)

2. At the end of the taste test, vote on a class or family favorite.

3. You can eat your leftover apples fresh, use them in a recipe (apple crisp, apple pie, apple bread, applesauce...yum, the list is endless), or save them for later by drying them. To dry apples:

- Slice washed and peeled apples into thin 1/8 inch thick slices or process the apples with an old-fashioned apple peeler/corer/slicer.
- Soak freshly cut slices for 15 minutes in an ascorbic acid (Vitamin C) solution to keep them from browning. This also adds some Vitamin C and helps to destroy potentially harmful bacteria during drying. Commercially prepared mixes of ascorbic and citric acid are usually available among canning supplies seasonally in supermarkets. Follow package directions. You can also use one part lemon juice mixed with one part water to keep apples from discoloring, although it will change their flavor slightly.
- Set your oven to 135 to 145 degrees F (if your oven doesn't have a setting this low, you'll end up cooking rather than drying your apples), or turn your dehydrator on to the appropriate setting. If you're using an oven, a convection oven is preferable. If you don't have a convection oven, leave the oven door open a few inches during the drying process to improve air flow.
- Prepared apple slices should then be arranged in a single layer on a dehydrator drying tray or on a cooling rack placed on a baking sheet. Dry the slices for six to twelve hours until they are leathery but still pliable. There should be no visible drops of juice on the fruit when you tear a cooled slice apart and press it between your fingers.
- Cool the slices completely. You can, of course, eat your apples right away! But if you plan to store them, condition them first by packing the dried slices loosely in an airtight for 7-10 days and giving them a shake daily. If you see any moisture condensing in the container, take the apples out and give them a little more time in the oven or dehydrator. Dried apples can be stored in an airtight container in a cool (60 degree F) spot for six months or more. They make a great snack and can even be reconstituted into sauce or pie filling!
- Apple varieties that are firm and sweet but with a little tartness will yield the tastiest dried apples with the best texture. Some good varieties include Honeycrisp, Golden Delicious, and Granny Smith.

4. For more information about growing and exploring apples, click here to download the [Simply Good – Apple](#) educational hand out from Chartwells K-12 and KidsGardening.