

Crab Apple Uses

Crab apple *malus sylvestris* is the only indigenous apple in Britain and a native tree of Scotland. Evidence of their use has been found in excavations, Crab apples have been found in early Bronze Age burial tombs.

The timber of the crab apple is uniform and dense in texture and if dried slowly, is excellent for woodworking. At one time it was used for making set squares and other drawing instruments.

The bark produces a yellow dye for wool or cloth.

The Celts and Vikings would have made the fruit more palatable by fermenting, drying and cooking the fruit with natural sugars.

Bees frequent the blossoms freely and crab apples are often planted in orchards to help cross pollinate orchard fruit. Crab apples increase the biodiversity of hedgerows and woodlands.

The High Pectin content of crab apples means they are a good addition to jam ingredients to aid setting.

High pectin gives a firm set.

Toffee crab apples were sold at fairs by traveller folk. Picked from hedgerows they were skewered and dipped in toffee. The word 'Lollipop' comes from the Romany *lolla* for red and *poppel* for apple.

Verjuice or jusvert meaning green juice

Medieval cooks used a lightly fermented juice of unripe grapes, gooseberries or crab apples for a juice used in cooking before lemons were commonplace.

Crab apples are rich in citric acid and malic acid which helps cut through richness in some foods such as oily fish.

In Northern Europe apples, particularly crab apples were, and still are, used to make a cooking liqueur or as an addition to sauces to balance the sweet element, or richness of a recipe.

To ferment crab apples

Chop 500g whole apples roughly and put into a jar, dissolve 1 tablespoon of sugar in hot water, cool and add to the apples, top up with warm water. Put a lid on loosely allowing gas to escape. Leave in a warm dark place, check taste frequently.

When fermented use in sauces, cook fish in the ferment, keep for a few weeks in the fridge, or freeze in ice cubes for future use.

Crab Apple Jelly

Crab apples have a stronger apple flavour than most cultivated apples and high pectin levels so the jelly is particularly good. Crab apples can be cooked with other fruits that do not have such good setting qualities to improve the flavour and setting potential.

Herbs and/or spices such as rosemary, thyme, lavender, mint, sloes, elderberry, elderflowers, blackberries, ginger, cinnamon, or cloves, may be added to this basic

crab apple jelly preferably contained in a muslin bag to avoid bits. Experiment, be curious.

Sprigs of herbs/flowers put in the jar at potting stage can look very attractive.

Basic recipe

Crab apples, water, lemon juice, sugar, herbs or spices to taste.

Halve the crab apples, put in a pan with 1.25 litres of water for each kilogram of fruit (1 pint per lb) simmer till tender, add juice of 1 lemon, strain through a jelly bag overnight

Measure the juice and put in a pan with chosen herbs or spices, add 800g of sugar for each litre of juice. Stir over gentle heat until sugar is dissolved, boil gently to set, pour into sterilised pots, cover when cold.

Crab Apple Butter

910g crab apples, 285ml (1/2 pint) water, sugar

Quarter crab apples, put in a pan with water and cook till really soft, push through a sieve, return to pan and add 500g sugar for each kilogram of pulp stirring constantly, cook until thick.

Sweet Pickled Crab Apples

1kg Crab Apples free from bruises

250g Sugar

Half a litre of cider vinegar

1 tspn of pickling spice

1 Cinnamon stick

Tspn of cloves

Put all spices into a muslin bag

Wash crab apples, leave stems

Put sugar, vinegar, bag of spices into a saucepan

Heat until sugar dissolves

Simmer for 5minutes

Add the apples and simmer gently until they are slightly soft

Take out the fruit and gently put into clean warm kilner jars

Remove spice bag and boil until syrup thickens slightly

Pour over apples and cover quickly

Serve with cold meats, game, Cheese, salads, vegetarian terrine, or ice cream!

Use any leftover syrup in dressings or sauces

Crab Apple Tea

Slice apples with peel on, simmer for an hour, strain, and sweeten with honey, drink.

Remember, an apple a day keeps the doctor away!

A Wassail cup for Yuletide

Wash the crab apples and make a score around their middles, place on a flat tray and cook in the oven for about 20 minutes

Make the Wassail drink in a large pan, put in 2 litres brown ale or cider add 3 tablespoons honey, ground cinnamon, half teaspoon ginger, half a teaspoon of cloves. Heat till almost boiling, take off heat, add the roasted apples and let the flavours infuse, a little brandy or whiskey can be added for a little more kick! Traditionally pieces of toast were also floated on the top to ensure good harvest and prosperity.

Crab Apple Vodka

30-40 crabs washed and sliced about 3mm thick and pack in a screw topped jar with layers of sugar

Top up the jar with vodka and screw up a piece of foil to keep the apples submerged and leave for six months jiggle occasionally, strain and drink with sparkling water or tonic and ice.

Healthy Drink

Crab apples were commonly used as a cleansing remedy so this juice may have health giving properties 'an apple a day keeps the doctor away'!

Crush and mince apples sprinkle with sea salt leave 24 hours, rinse, put through a juicer, strain through muslin and bottle. Keep in the fridge until too fizzy to use.

Add to cordials,

Can be frozen in small batches in ice trays

Crabby Apple Sauce to serve with dressed Crab, Crabmeat or other fish!

Old saying: The crab of the wood, is sauce very good, for the crab of the sea

Cut 200gm of crab apples in half, cook in 500ml water until soft. Press through a coarse sieve.

Add to the pulp - 1 heaped teaspoon of white miso, 1 dessertspoon fine chopped parsley, black pepper and sea salt to taste, when serving top with a sprinkle of Nori flakes.

Tip- Save the juice from the cooked apples, sweeten with honey and drink or add to cocktails!
