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New books offer apple adventures

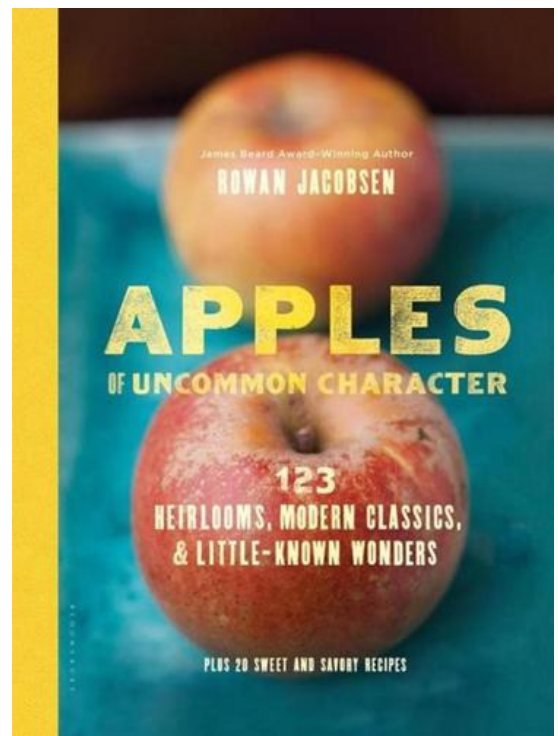
By **T. Susan Chang**

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From tart Gravensteins to fat Mutsus, apples define fall whether they're in the lunchbox or baked in a pie.

Everyone has a favorite eating, or dessert, apple. Some like Honeycrisp, others Macoun. But when it comes to baking, preferences tend to blur and soften like cooked fruit. We all know that Cortlands stay white and keep their shape in the oven, and Granny Smith makes a nice addition to a pie, but how do you really know which apples can take the heat?



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In his thorough and engaging “[Apples of Uncommon Character](#),” Rowan Jacobsen offers the answers: cellulose and acid. “An apple with a lot of cellulose in its cell walls will be firm and crunchy. . . and that is the key to a good baking apple, because some of its cellulose will remain intact when cooked,” he writes. Acid, he continues, helps prevent pectin from melting when heated, keeping the cell walls more resistant. An acidic apple will taste more refreshing in a sugary dessert, he writes, and retain more firmness.

Perhaps the most commonly available baking apple is Golden Delicious, but keep your eyes open for less well-known but far more complex regional specialties, like Northern Spy, Roxbury Russet, and Rhode Island Greening. Many bakers swear by a mix of apples, and orchardists often satisfy that demand by selling bargain-priced medleys of “utility” apples that are slightly dinged or blemished, but every bit as flavorful.

Once you’ve got a peck or a bushel of your favorites, it’s time to make pie. There’s no reason to abandon a double-crust pie, but the last couple of years have brought something of a renaissance in pie books. For those looking for a bit of baked adventure, there’s plenty to choose from.

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Apple hand pies, made with apple butter and a toothy wheaten crust, get a star turn in “Huckleberry,” from the Santa Monica bakery of the same name. They’re palm-size, delicate, and addictive. In Caroline Bretherton’s “Pies: Sweet and Savory,” you’ll find a deceptively gorgeous yet simple apple “jalousie,” its filling peeping out from a frame of puff pastry (which you might as well just pick up at your grocery freezer, though she provides the scratch recipe).

And for traditionalists who prefer their apples in the round, there are no fewer than 10 apple pies in pastry teacher Kate Lebo’s “Pie School: Lessons in Fruit, Flour, and Butter.” Among them is a whiskey crumble pie, into which you can pour just as much booze as you think the occasion warrants.

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