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 Making cider is part of the apple-brandy manufacturing process, so William sells a Longueville cider and plans to double production to 60,000 litres next year. "Cider is the same as wine, except that it's made from apples," he says. "And that's how people view our cider, more as something to drink with food and an Irish alternative to wine."

Simon Tyrell, a leading Wicklow-based wine distributor with a diploma in wine production, was also quick to spot the benefits of making cider. "Obviously, we can't grow vines here and I wanted to find something to ferment, so it had to be apples," he says.

He set up Craigie's Cider with two business partners and launched the first bottling of Ballyhook Flyer this week. It is made from apples from Carrick-on-Suir and Cappoquin in Co Waterford. Tyrell believes there is a great future for Irish craft cider, and with his wife, Emma, he has set up Cider Ireland, an association for artisan producers.

The organisation is campaigning to change the duty levels charged on the drink which are 66c per litre for most ciders, compared with 16c for beer. "We feel that we are using Irish-grown apples to make an indigenous Irish product, so why shouldn't we get the same duty as beer?" he says.

Cider Ireland has written to Simon Coveney, the agriculture minister, who has promised to raise the issue with Michael Noonan, the finance minister.

In addition to high duty payments, the Irish craft cider industry faces another disadvantage compared with rivals in Britain and Northern Ireland. "The UK has a wonderful law that says there's no duty if you make less than 7,000 litres of cider a year," says Emerson.

"So it is a great benefit for small craft producers in Armagh, such as Sean McAtee, who makes Mac's Armagh Cider; and Craig Toby, who makes Toby's Handcrafted Cider and Tempted, another premium cider."



EMMA TYRELL; NEIL DANTON

Selecting apples at Craigie's Cider; left, William O'Callaghan of Longueville



Emerson says a change in regulations to support small producers would benefit the economy.

Rod Calder-Potts agrees: "We have to pay the Revenue Commissioners, on day one, a €500 licensing certification, plus duty and VAT after that. So the British model would be great. It would be great to have more people making craft cider."

Producers are keen to educate the public about the drink, and many have run tours of their cideries, as well as tutored tastings and dinners with food pairings. David Llewellyn, who makes a dry cider at Llewellyn's Orchard in Lusk, Co Dublin, runs one-day courses on how to make the drink. The last event of the year takes place on November 24 (see below for website).

You can also catch him on

Saturdays at the Temple Bar farmers' market and on Sundays at Dun Laoghaire farmers' market in Dublin where, this month, he is selling a five-litre container of a pressed blend of cider apples for €12.50.

The fermentation process has started, so you will be able to bottle and enjoy your own brew — but, unlike the Calder-Potts, you will not have to tell the Revenue.

Core products: a guide to cider makers

Highbank Proper cider
 Rod and Julie Calder-Potts produce Ireland's only organic cider. Made from a blend of their own cider apples, it's crisp and carbonated as a result of a second fermentation in the bottle. There is also Drivers cider, a non-alcoholic, unfermented version. highbankorchards.com

Stonewell Irish Craft cider
 Daniel Emerson produces two ciders made from Irish Dabinett, Michelin, Elstar, Falstaff and Jonagold apple varieties. The refreshing medium-dry cider, with its strong apple aroma, is

carbonated, and the darker dry cider has hints of citrus. stonewellcider.com

Longueville House cider
 William O'Callaghan's cider is made in Mallow, Co Cork. He uses a blend of Dabinett and Michelin apples from the Longueville orchard, and Karmine apples from Con Trass's apple farm in Cahir, Co Tipperary, to round out the flavour. His amber-coloured medium-dry cider has a delicious apple nose. longuevillehouse.ie

Craigie's cider
 Co Wicklow-based Simon Tyrell

and his business partner make two blends of cider at Ballyhook Farm in Grangecon. The Ballyhook Flyer is a sparkling, dry, medium-bodied cider made with Dabinett, Katy and Bramley apples. The second blend, Dalliance, is made from Falstaff and Elstar varieties and is similar in style to a wine. craigiescider.com

Double L cider
 Producing cider on a small scale in Lusk, Co Dublin, David Llewellyn has used a variety of apples over the years and favours a drier style. He blends juice from the Dabinett apple

with Bramleys and a range of sweet dessert apple varieties. fruitandvine.com

Orpens cider
 Dublin-based Chris Hill and Matt Tindal, who both have a wine background, launched their Orpens cider earlier this year, which they make in Armagh in Northern Ireland from a blend of seven varieties of apple, including Michelin, Dabinett, Bramley and dessert apples such as Golden Delicious. It is a medium cider, softer than the dry blends, but not as sweet as you would expect. mcthirst.ie

RECIPES

MONA AND RON'S WISE GUIDE TO COOKING

It's time to enjoy the apple harvest and these recipes offer delicious ways to make the most of the fruit's versatility

Apples are a sweet way to enjoy the autumn season. In our home they are a constant in school lunch boxes, baked into breads or savoured with a wedge of Mossfield cheese and a mug of tea on the evenings we are feeling tired.

Although this hasn't been an excellent year for the fruit, we still have high hopes that November will bring bushels of red Jonagolds to the market. If so, we will stack and store a few crates in the shed for the winter.

It's best to store apples in the coolest part of the house so they do not over-ripen quickly. The versatility of this firm-fleshed fruit means that they need never go to waste. There are numerous ways to incorporate them into your diet and most are easy to master.

A simple apple salad, such as our couscous recipe, right, for example, is fast to prepare and versatile. Just amend it to suit any season. This week's is loaded with autumnal hazelnuts and

pomegranate seeds, but in winter it can be spiced up with a dash of harissa, chickpeas and smoked paprika.

Bacon and cabbage is one of those cold-weather comfort foods many of us yearn for from time to time. Instead of adding potatoes to the mix, we use apples with cabbage sauté.

The fruit is full of fibre. So much so that apples can provide a substitute for potatoes, rice or pasta.

Our gorgeous autumn apple cake is chock full of fruit and it's healthy, too. It gets most of its sweetness from the apples and contains only a small amount of butter. We like to use duck eggs when making this cake as they have rich orange yolks. To achieve maximum volume when whisking the egg whites, make sure they are at room temperature.

You can get in touch at monaandron@sunday-times.ie and you can find other delicious recipes on the couple's blog, wisewords.ie



KITCHEN KIT

TOOLING AROUND
 DIY-ers who like to get busy in the kitchen will love Bosch's new IXO Gourmet Set.

The stainless-steel spice grinder and corkscrew set attach to a cordless screwdriver to give meal times a rugged edge. A teeny bit over the top for everyday meals, but perfect for Come Dine With Me. €76 (including screwdriver), amazon.ie

