



AN *Autumn* TRADITION

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VENICE GULF COAST LIVING MAGAZINE

In a season often celebrated with flavorful concoctions of caramel, chocolate and other decadent delights, it's refreshing to note that one of the most delicious treats of fall, the apple, comes straight from nature. Whether plucked directly from the tree or selected from the many varieties on display at a farmers' market, an apple is simply refreshing, with a crisp, delicate sweetness that's all its own.

Perhaps that's why this succulent fruit is part of so many seasonal traditions. In regions where orchards abound, apple picking is a rite of fall for many who enjoy making a yearly journey to fields, full of trees that are heavy with fruit, and picking until their bushel brims over with freshly plucked treasures. This bounty is often used for making spiced cider, crumble-topped pies and other tempting baked goods, or may just be savored in its natural state.

Apple bobbing, a custom that goes back hundreds of years, is often a part of fun Halloween or fall celebrations, but historically, its origins have more to do with love and romance than trick-or-

treating. The activity began as a British courting ritual that was popular among young ladies and their potential suitors, and there were a few different ways to go about playing this game. One set of rules dictated that each apple was assigned to a particular person, so the participants would try to bite into the one named for their desired match. In this game, the couple's romantic future was predicated on the number of attempts needed to obtain the apple, with the fewest tries signaling the best outcomes. Another variation had players racing to be the first to bite an apple, since the winner was purported to be the first who would marry. Ladies often brought the fruit of their bobbing efforts home with them since, in accordance with folklore of the period, it was believed that a woman would dream about her soulmate if she put the apple she had bitten beneath her pillow.

While these games were all the rage when they debuted, they declined in popularity over time to the point that they only continued in Ireland and certain parts of England by the 1800s. During this century, a variation of this pastime with a unique spin



to it developed which came to be known as "snap apple." In this challenging endeavor, a four-pronged device with two apples interspersed between a pair of lit candles was rotated overhead, and guests tried to take a bite from either fruit without getting singed by the candles.

As the 19th century drew to a close, these pastimes enjoyed a resurgence when Americans who sought to reconnect with their immigrant roots brought this fall tradition in as a game for children and adults at Halloween parties. At this time, the activity began to take on its familiar form. Apples were placed in a tub full of cool water, where they floated to the surface due to the principle of buoyancy. Using only their teeth, players then

attempted to grasp one of the fruits that bobbed up and down on the surface. Upping the challenge, participants might have their arms secured behind their backs or have their eyes covered with a blindfold, which made the task more difficult, yet rewarding to accomplish. In another version, rather than placing the fruit in water, the apples were suspended by string from the ceiling. Today, a variation on this style involves swapping the fruit out for marshmallows, which can be ideal for small children who might otherwise have difficulty obtaining one of these naturally sweet treats.

When searching for a fun autumn activity you and your guests can truly "sink your teeth into," look no further than apple bobbing!

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