



CIDER

on the rise

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From small-scale artisanal beginnings, Ontario craft ciders have taken off in a groundswell of popularity, especially for summertime refreshment!

IT'S SUMMER. IT'S HOT. You're having your lunch out of doors. You don't want the alcohol of wine and you don't feel like another encounter with the aggressive hops that lurk in your favourite craft IPA. It's the perfect moment for cider.

These days, more and more people are starting to share that opinion. Cider sales are soaring at the LCBO and ciders are showing up increasingly frequently on menus and beer and wine lists. It's not a trend or a fad—it's more that cider is finally taking back its rightful place in the natural order of things. And, just as with beer, there are ciders to suit every taste—some light and merry, others a great deal more complex, some mass-produced by international brands, others crafted by enthusiastic individuals right next to their own orchard. Apples grow superlatively well in Ontario and while it has taken a while to get government support (after six years of lobbying, cideries were finally granted an annual tax rebate last year) the future of cider in Ontario looks rosy. So if you haven't already done so, it's time to get to know Ontario cider.

Cider is as old as the hills. Ancient Greeks and Hebrews drank something very like it; when the Romans invaded Britain (bringing their own domestic apple cultivars with them) they found the Celtic population was already fermenting cider from native wild crab apple trees. So were the Gauls in northwestern France and the Celts of northern Spain. Those parts of Europe remain the heartlands of cider culture where hundreds of different varieties of cider apples are grown, too tart, bitter or tannic to make pleasant eating but essential for some styles of cider.

And cider does come in many styles. In the west of England, scrumpy is the renowned descendant of the “rough” cider medieval farm hands received as part of their wages—unfiltered and cloudy, uncarbonated, potent and bone-dry—but you’ll also find other, equally popular ciders that are as clear, refined and sparkling as Champagne. In Normandy, dry, off-dry and sweet ciders are everywhere, some barrel-aged, others fizzy and yeasty from a second fermentation in the bottle. People there treat them with the same respect that Frenchmen in other parts of the country show to their wine.

When European pioneers first started to colonize Ontario and Quebec they planted apple trees on their farms for cider as much as for food. Cider was simpler to make than beer (grain was needed for food and cattle feed) and was considerably healthier to drink than water. Mature apple trees are much less trouble to farm than grapes or grain, but getting them started wasn’t so easy, back in the day. In Europe, apple trees are pollinated by honey bees, which are not native to North America. What’s more, when you propagate apple trees from seeds instead of grafting, the odds are small that the fruit of the new tree will resemble its parent at all. More often than not it will be too tart or bitter to eat—but it can still be used to make excellent cider. The farmers persevered and, by the mid-1800s, rural Ontario was full of apple orchards. In those days more people drank cider than drank beer. Hard cider-making was part of life but it seems to have been a domestic rather than a commercial activity—at best a cottage industry.

Beer started to overtake cider with the advent of more German immigrants and the founding of large-scale breweries

Graft different apple cultivars onto a single rootstock—you’ll have a cider blend from a single tree!



ontario orchards

Professor John Cline at the University of Guelph is working with the Ontario Craft Cider Association to research the potential of farming classic cider apples from France and England. These varieties often have more exaggerated acidity, sugars or tannins than table apples and fall into four categories: sweets, sharps, bitter-sweets and bitter-sharps. Blending them to make uniquely flavoured and balanced cider is part of the traditional cider maker’s art. Semi-dwarf apple trees take up to six years to bear fruit, so cider lovers must be patient a little longer...





CIDERIES YOU CAN VISIT

➔ Look for the Ontario Craft Cider Association's red apple logo on bottles and cans. The OCCA has a vision to develop and maintain a world-class cider industry in the province of Ontario using only local fruit and craft methods. Many OCCA members welcome visitors and offer tastings. The following cideries (and wineries that make cider) go a little further and are well worth a special trip.

The County Cider Company

countycider.com, Waupoos, Prince Edward County

Tutored tastings. Patio restaurant. Store. Spectacular views of Lake Ontario.

Coffin Ridge Boutique Winery

coffinridge.ca, Annan, Grey County

Home of Forbidden ciders. Stay there overnight at The Resting Place B&B. Stunning views of Georgian Bay.

Spirit Tree Estate Cidery

spirittreecider.com, Caledon

Bistro, artisanal bakery and farm shop. Pick your own apples. Many unique seasonal ciders to try.

Georgian Hills Vineyards

georgianhillsvineyards.ca, Blue Mountains

Home of Ardiel Cider House ciders. Tasting room and food. Tours of the region.

Applewood Farm & Winery

applewoodfarmwinery.com, Stouffville

Fruit winery and cidery. Pick your own apples and strawberries. Tasting room and store.

Somerset Orchards

westavenue.ca, Freelon

Home of West Avenue's fascinating, traditionally crafted seasonal ciders. Farm store and bakery.

Twin Pines Orchards

twinpinesorchards.com, Thedford

Cider House store for gourmet products, kitchenware, pottery. Pick your own apples.

but the body blow to cider culture was Prohibition, which hit Ontario in 1916 and lasted 11 years. By the time the law was repealed, the vast majority of cider apple trees had been replaced with varieties meant for eating. Of course, you can make fabulous cider out of crisp, tart local apples like Ida Red, Russet, Spartan, Empire, McIntosh and Spy, as today's craft cideries have proved, but for most of the 20th century very few people seemed to want to. It was only in the 1990s, when the bottom fell out of the apple juice market, that anyone decided to try. Grant Howes opened a cidery on

his parent's apple farm in Prince Edward County in 1995. He called it The County Cider Company and it's still going strong, a most beautiful place to visit on a summer's day, surrounded by 40 acres of orchard where 16 different varieties of apple are growing.

Grant Howes passed away in 2017, but he had seen an amazing growth in craft cider over the last eight or nine years. "He was happy to finally have some brothers in the cider industry," says Thomas Wilson, who opened Spirit Tree Estate Cidery in 2009. "Grant was always so generous with his experience and advice."

Cider makers stick together. Both Howes and Wilson were among the group of seven or eight at a dinner at Spencer's at the Waterfront in Burlington, one evening in the late fall of 2011. Chris Haworth, the restaurant's chef, was also a craft cider maker, owner of West Avenue Cider Company in Hamilton. That night, they decided the time had come to get organized. The Ontario Craft Cider Association was born, a body that does for cider what the VQA does for wine, guaranteeing quality and insisting that locally sourced apples (at least 85 percent) be used. The OCCA has expanded amazingly quickly, now

CIDER AND FOOD

With its tangy apple flavour and natural acidity, dry cider is a natural partner to a huge variety of foods.

The bistro at **Spirit Tree Estate Cidery** specializes in English and French bistro dishes that work beautifully with cider—pork (of course), poultry and game birds, fondue... What goes best with the draught cider? "Roast duck," says Thomas Wilson, "because of the touch of spiciness and the bit of Brett' in the cider."

Up at **Georgian Hills Vineyard** you can sit on the patio and eat pork sausages with Ardiel cider—a brilliant match. "The old apple-and-pork combo," says Robert Ketchin. "You can't go wrong. But it's also brilliant with really hot, spicy things like chicken wings in suicide sauce. Cider dissipates the burn."

At Canada's first cider bar, **Her Father's Cider Bar + Kitchen**, on Harbord Street in Toronto (herfathers.ca), I tasted some of the best fried chicken in town, a great match with very dry Beaver Valley Flagship cider. The restaurant's owner, Joshua Mott, is the son of the couple that own Beaver Valley cidery so it's not surprising it features among the 100-plus Canadian and international ciders on offer.

Sweet, tangy ice cider has its own culinary *raison d'être*. Superb with apple desserts, it's also a brilliant match to foie gras or blue cheese. Look for **Domaine Pinnacle Ice Cider** (LCBO 94094, 375 mL, \$24.35) or **Georgian Hills Ida Red Frozen to the Core** (LCBO 359380, 375 mL, \$20.40).



boasting a membership of 33 cider producers, all of whom use only Ontario fruit in their products. This distinguishes them from many large commercial producers who make their ciders from sugar, water and apple concentrates brought in from other provinces or countries.

That authenticity is one reason Ontario craft cider has experienced such a surge in popularity. Another is the character of ciders from this province. These are still early days but a recognizably Ontario style

By a curiosity of provincial law, cider is categorized as a fruit wine, even though most people enjoy it as if it were beer.

seems to be emerging. Robert Ketchin, one of the partners in the Ardiel Cider House in the Beaver Valley, not far from Collingwood, describes it as “vibrant, fresh, fruit-driven, refreshing and with good acidity. Other countries and provinces use different apples, different yeasts and have quite a different style,” he points out. “If you were to compare Ontario craft cider with wine, it wouldn’t be Chardonnay; it would be Riesling or New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc.”

John Ardiel’s family has been growing apples in the Beaver Valley for four generations. Nestled in the Blue Mountains along the south shore of Georgian Bay, this is one of the most favoured parts of the province for apple growing, thanks to a microclimate that protects trees from early frosts. This microclimate also miti-

Flavoured Ciders

Ciders flavoured with another fruit juice such as cherry or peach abound but some cideries are getting a little more adventurous.



SHINY APPLE CIDER WITH PINOT NOIR
LCBO 515098, 473 mL, \$3.80

Launched in 2014, Shiny Apple ciders are made at Small Talk Vineyards in Niagara (formerly Stonechurch). A dash of Pinot colours this semi-sweet cider pink and lends a subtle vinous note.

COLLECTIVE ARTS HONEY & LAVENDER CIDER
LCBO 560250, 473 mL, \$3.75

Some breweries make cider too! This cider is tart and fairly dry with a pleasing lavender floral note. The flavour rather than the sweetness of honey shines out in the lingering finish.

THORNBURY CRAFT CRANBERRY CIDER
LCBO 571786, 500 mL, \$3.45

Cranberry juice adds tartness and intensity to a small-batch apple cider, nicely balancing sweetness and acidity. Thornbury suggests serving it on ice or with a splash of orange juice to further boost the fruitiness.

gated the damage done by the drought of 2016 that reduced the 2017 apple crop in other parts of Ontario by almost 50 percent. “Apples are our bread and butter,” says Ardiel. “We have about 280 acres of apple orchards so, unlike some cider producers, we grow all our own fruit.”

A few years ago, Ardiel and his two sons joined up with Robert Ketchin to create a winery they called Georgian Hills

Vineyards. “It was supposed to be a hobby,” says Ardiel, “but as it grew it just seemed natural to say let’s take a shot at cider.” Why not? They already had a winery licence and, by a curiosity of provincial law, cider is categorized as a fruit wine, even though most people enjoy it as if it were a beer.

Perhaps it’s not that strange after all. Like wine, cider is fermented fruit juice,



hopped ciders

The latest trend is for hopped ciders, alarming apple purists but attracting craft beer enthusiasts.

Many craft ciders are making them and they are well worth seeking out.

Ardiel Cider House uses Cascade hops to give gentle notes of citrus, pine and oregano to its cider—the kind of funky flavours that some cider apples have but eating apples don't.

not a brewed drink. Ardiel Cider House uses a specific blend of apples for the sake of consistency and three kinds of yeast—two cider yeasts and a wine yeast—that bring out aromatics, mid-palate nuances and fruity characteristics. When fermentation is complete, the percentage of alcohol by volume is around 7.5. Commercial ciders might bring this down by adding water and sugar; Ardiel back-blends fresh, unfermented apple juice to reach an ABV of 6%. It's more expensive but it adds to the quality and keeps sugar levels at a reasonable mark. Just before bottling, the cider goes into a Brite tank for carbonation, and voilà! Classic Ardiel Dry Apple Cider—delicious, super-refreshing and, like all cider, gluten-free.

Few if any other wineries in Ontario have the apple background of Ardiel but several wineries have recently taken advantage of their licensed right and have begun to make ciders. Visit Tawse Winery or Ravine Vineyard Estate Winery in Niagara and you'll find very fine house ciders at the tasting bar. The same is true at Coffin Ridge Vineyard

Pear Ciders

Pear cider or perry is a natural counterpart to apple cider and in England and France, cider pears are often added to the cider apple blend. Pear trees take many years longer to bear fruit than apple trees and the ripe fruit doesn't store well, so pear cider is relatively hard to find. In Ontario it is now made with Bosc, Bartlett or other eating pears—fragrant, floral and delicious.

COUNTY PEAR CIDER

LCBO 424093, 500 mL, \$7.00

Lightweight, semi-sweet but with a balancing acidity, the County Cider Company's offering smells and tastes like ripe fresh pears. Aromatic and delightful, it's delicious with madeleine cakes.



near Owen Sound. Cider tourism has enormous potential; it surely won't be long until Ontario has a cidery trail winding from Niagara up to Georgian Bay and down to Prince Edward County.

Thomas Wilson's Spirit Tree Estate Cidery in Caledon would be a can't-miss stop on such a route. There's a first-class bakery and a bistro on site, a farm shop selling Spirit Tree's line of apple-based products and other locally made artisanal treats. It's also where you can sample the estate's seasonal and small-batch ciders. Wilson travelled to Somerset, England, to learn how to make cider, and the influence

and inspiration are clear. He makes a seasonal scrumpy as well as darker, heavier ciders in a strong ale style, not to mention perry, pear-lavender or crab apple rosé cider and a barrel-aged vintage reserve. Even his flagship draught cider has a hint of Brettanomyces funk to it, to the delight of sour beer aficionados.

As chair of the OCCA, Wilson has a vision for the future of cider in Ontario. "Here, table apple growing is fading," he says, "but cider can save it. It could become a very significant industry. Cider is doing so well internationally—the U.K. cider industry nets six billion pounds annually!"

Ontario has a way to go—total craft cider sales in 2015 were around \$12.3 million. But here things are only beginning to take root. More cideries start up every year, to the delight of fans who enjoy the purity and freshness of traditional and flavoured ciders. Meanwhile the OCCA has partnered with the University of Guelph in a long-term project planting traditional cider apple varieties all across Ontario, to see which ones are best suited to particular regions. The story of cider may already be 3,000 years old, but a new chapter is being written right here in Ontario.

THE TASTE OF ONTARIO CRAFT CIDER

➔ Vibrant fresh apple flavours and refreshing acidity are a given when you choose one of these ciders. The fun is tasting what else they might have to offer.

Ciders are made to be served chilled, to balance acidity and sweetness perfectly.



WAUPOOS PREMIUM CIDER

LCBO 612804, 4 pk, \$13.70

The County Cider Company's iconic top-selling cider for more than 20 years has a hint of tannic earthy cider apple beneath the fresh apple flavour. Medium-dry, immensely satisfying.

COFFIN RIDGE FORBIDDEN DRY CIDER

LCBO 374496, 473 mL, \$3.05

And dry it is, with a racy acidity—a lemony tang like biting into a Granny Smith apple that lingers into an impressively long finish. A good choice for cider cups or punches.

SPIRIT TREE DRAUGHT CIDER

LCBO 413153, 473 mL, \$3.30

Here's a fresh, medium-dry cider with a suggestion of funky Brettanomyces on the nose and a wisp of nutmeg behind the fulsome apple flavour. Sharp carbonation quenches your thirst.

ARDIEL DRY APPLE CIDER

LCBO 497214, 473 mL, \$3.25

The first taste is tart and dry with a delicious fresh-apple aroma and flavour, but there's more to it—a hint of yeasty complexity in the mid-palate and a herbal note that's almost like fennel.

TAWSE CIDER

LCBO 569350, 473 mL, \$3.25

A project from the renowned Niagara winery, this is a dry, bright, crisp, straightforward cider with the aroma and flavour of green apples. Extremely refreshing on a hot afternoon!