



Brian Medford's homemade apple butter, served on slices of toast.

Fresh from the tree

Homemade apple butter recipe

BY BRIAN MEDFORD

My friend, Deb, called last week to inform me that the apples on her apple tree weren't going to pick themselves. So, I went to pick apples.

It's a sign that summer is waning, and fall's chill-in-the air arrival is imminent. Fall is my season. I can highlight my cardigan collection and my love of warming fall flavors. Essentially, fall is when I shine.

Deb's apple tree is grafted and produces to two apple varieties. I think they're Jonathan and Honeycrisp. If that's wrong, they're still delicious.

There is a joy in methodically selecting an apple on a branch and gently pulling it from the tree. It feels calming and peaceful. Until I hit my head on the low hanging branch that Deb tied a red ribbon on months ago so I could avoid it, but I still walked into it. Even so I still say a quiet thank you for each harvested apple.

To celebrate fall's arrival, some folks crave a pumpkin-spiced something or other,

I crave apple butter. Apple butter is the jam of cooked apples. The flavors of caramelized apples with spices can only be revealed with time and patience.

As with peanut butter, there are two types of apple butter people in the world: chunky and creamy. I prefer chunky, which is the consistency of thick apple sauce. If that's not the apple butter you remember, you can puree the mixture until it's velvety smooth. For me, creamy apple butter means another appliance to wash, so I'll pass.

I use a slow cooker, which takes 8 to 10 hours on low heat to produce a concentrated, amber-colored apple butter. I start the cooker before bed and wake-up to finished apple butter brilliance in the morning.

I store the apple butter in the fridge and greedily devour it on toast, pancakes, as a side for pork or just with a spoon. You may also hot water bath can the apple butter to preserve it for a year. It's a Christmas gift we all want.

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Apple Butter

Yield: about 4 pints. The addition of apple cider vinegar may seem unexpected, but it gives the apple butter a fresh and bright flavor. Store in the fridge for up to 2 weeks.

- 5 pounds peeled, cored and cut apples
- 1 1/2 cups apple cider or apple juice
- 1/4 cup apple cider vinegar
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 1/2 cup light brown sugar, lightly packed
- 1/4 teaspoons kosher salt
- 2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
- 1/2 teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cloves
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract

Place the prepared apples in a slow cooker. Add the apple cider, apple cider vinegar, sugars, salt, cinnamon, nutmeg and cloves. Mix well.

Cook on low heat for 8 hours, stir occasionally. Cook for an additional 1 to 2 hours if needed to soften the apples.

Uncover and stir the apples until they transform into a thick, apple sauce texture. Stir in the vanilla.

Spoon the mixture into containers and refrigerate.