

# Golden apple

## Genus Malus

### *Malus sieversii*



An apple is an edible fruit produced by an apple tree. Apple trees are cultivated worldwide and are the most widely grown species in the genus *Malus*. The tree

originated in Central Asia, where its wild ancestor, *Malus sieversii*, is still found today

The golden apple is an element that appears in various national and ethnic folk legends or fairy tales. Recurring themes depict a hero (for example Hercules or Făt-Frumos) retrieving the golden apples hidden or stolen by a monstrous antagonist. Gold apples also appear on the Silver Branch of the Otherworld in Irish mythology.

In the Western world, apples epitomise the ultimate fruit. Widely consumed since Antiquity, over the centuries they have fuelled numerous stories, as an ambivalent symbol, both a promise of immortality and a poison destroying the fabric of society. As a foodstuff, apples have always been appreciated as flavoursome and nutritive, as well as for their medicinal and nutritional virtues – and still are to this day.

# Highly symbolic fruit

Apples have been easily accessible and widely consumed since Antiquity. In fact, several European languages, including Greek, Latin, English and French, used the word 'apple' to refer to all fruit. In the West, apples are seen as highly thirst-quenching and nourishing. They not only represent health, but are also a guarantee of eternal youth and immortality. Over the centuries, they have repeatedly fuelled pagan myths, the biblical narrative, fairy tales and popular legends, and have become part of the collective imagination as a powerful and ambivalent symbol, associated with seduction and femininity. Greek mythology, both gods and mortals coveted the golden apples the mother goddess Gaia gave as a wedding present to Hera and Zeus. They were kept in a garden guarded by the Hesperides, daughters of the goddess of the night, and

by Ladon, a hundred-headed dragon that never slept. These apples promised immortality and anyone who ate them would never again experience hunger, thirst, suffering or illness. According to one version of the myth, Eris, the goddess of discord, was furious at not having been invited to the wedding of Thetis and Peleus, so she took one of the apples and threw it among the guests. The apple was inscribed with the words 'To the fairest' and caused mayhem among the crowd.



This event led to the Judgement of Paris, to end the quarrel by choosing the most beautiful goddess. Paris gave the golden apple to Aphrodite, the goddess of love, beauty and fertility, who, in return, promised to give him the beautiful Helen of Troy, thereby triggering the Trojan War. In another Greek myth, Eurystheus commands Heracles (Hercules in Roman mythology) to fulfil twelve labours, one of which was to steal these same golden apples by braving Ladon (the dragon). In Celtic mythology, portrayals of Lugh, one of the prominent gods, usually show him holding three apples, signs of immortality, power and prosperity. In Snorri's Edda, a 13th-century collection of Norse myths in prose form, the goddess Iðunn is the keeper of the apples of immortality, food of the gods. The giant Þjazi, forcibly takes her far away from Asgard, and this abduction causes the premature ageing of the gods.

In Christian tradition, due to a shift in meaning in the Vulgate (the Late Latin translation of the Bible), the apple tree represents the tree of knowledge and temptation, the Fall of Man, when Adam and Eve bite into the forbidden fruit. In the popular oral tradition of Western fairy tales, Snow White naively bites into a poisoned apple, but her death, albeit temporary, is followed by a resurrection.



# Nutritive and medicinal qualities

Apples have always been appreciated for their taste and nutritive qualities. Whether raw or cooked, they hold an important place in Western diets, in sweet and sour dishes as well as in cakes and desserts.

In addition, apples are said to offer medicinal and cosmetic benefits. Medieval pomade was an ointment made from mashed apples mixed with fat and used to treat both skin and hair. Daily habits and popular sayings also indicate the medicinal virtues of apples. Given their high glucose content, the idea that apples prevent tooth decay is debatable, but the act of biting into an apple massages the gums. Eating a raw apple procures more of a feeling of fullness than consuming it in the form of juice or puree.

Like most fruit, apples are a good source of vitamins, fibre and minerals. Many different languages now feature the British saying, 'An apple a day keeps the doctor away'.

The 'Apple' menu, the success of a multinational

Nowadays, apples remain rich and evocative. They are widely used in advertisements, associating them with health, youth, knowledge or temptation. One of the most famous logos in the world today is that of Apple, the American multinational specialised in electronic products. According to Walter Isaacson, biographer to Steve Jobs, co-founder and CEO of Apple, it was pure coincidence that the company was named after the fruit: At that time, Steve Jobs was working on an apple orchard and was on a fruit-based diet. The first logo in 1976 represented Isaac Newton sitting under an apple tree.



It was soon modernised to become an apple with a bite taken out of it, which is somewhat reminiscent of the original sin. An urban legend claims that the current logo was actually a tribute to Alan Turing, one of the founders of modern IT. Turing deciphered the coded messages of the Germans during the Second World War and committed suicide by biting into an apple laced with cyanide. However, according to other sources, the bite in the apple was simply a graphic choice, to ensure that the apple would not be mistaken for a cherry. Any symbolic meaning would have been sheer serendipity.