

# Quality Honeycrisp need good harvest, storage practices

By Christine Morris  
Assistant Editor

Honeycrisp growers are finding they can barely keep up with demand for the apple, which is driven by a combination of crisp texture with wonderful flavor, said Chris Watkins, a horticulture professor at Cornell University. In order to provide those qualities, the fruit have to be harvested at the right time. And if it's stored, there are certain conditions that must be met.

The start date for harvesting can vary yearly depending on the season but normally lands around mid-September.

The harvest period for Honeycrisp is typically the second to fourth week of September for western New York, Watkins said. But the optimum period is likely to be two weeks and include spot picking. In Minnesota, harvest usually begins somewhere between Sept. 10-15 and also has a window of two weeks, said Ralph Yates, secretary of the Minnesota Apple Growers Association

"It's a fall or winter variety, but you have to harvest it like a summer variety," Yates said. "It requires a minimum of three, and

probably four or more, picks."

Using a combination of index testing and visual observations can help identify the harvest date. For New York, Watkins said Honeycrisp should be harvested when the reddest colored fruit have a starch index of seven, a minimum firmness of 13.5 pounds and about 13 percent soluble solids.

To find the starch index, cut an apple in half and drip iodine solution over it. Starch is present where the fruit is stained dark blue. Then by comparing the amount of dark blue coverage to a starch chart, which you can request from Cornell Extension, you can find the starch index number.

A high percentage of soluble solids are desirable in Honeycrisp, but harvest shouldn't be delayed if it isn't as high as recommended, Watkins said. Otherwise you can run into storage disorders.

When harvest is delayed there are greater risks for flavor changes, increased susceptibility to stem end cracking, soft scald development, soggy breakdown and a higher rot potential.

Harvesting at the proper maturity can reduce stem end splitting, which tends to happen in warmer regions. And if the fruit



Some growers find it challenging to keep up with the demand for Honeycrisp.

are ripe and rain is in the forecast, growers should harvest before the wetting event, Watkins said.

Soft scald and soggy breakdown are post-harvest disorders, which don't show up for about 60 days after being stored. Both disorders are related to storing the apples close to 32° F instead of the recommended 38° F and are more susceptible if the apples were harvested late, Watkins said.

A delay treatment of a week at 50° F can eliminate those disorders without loss of fruit quality. But bitter pit development may be higher if fruit are susceptible.

When an apple has low calcium it becomes more susceptible to bitter pit.

"You can put fruit away that look just fine and then bitter pit will develop while in cold storage," Watkins said. A calcium drench does not work. The bottom line is that growers need to spray calcium while fruit is on the tree throughout the growing season.

"Growers should also practice good orchard management practices that will minimize the competition between fruit and leaves for available calcium," he said.

Special care is needed when harvesting

and handling this variety to minimize damage.

"Honeycrisp is a thin-stemmed apple and can be easily bruised and damaged," Watkins said. Tender care is required at all stages of the handling process.

"A puncture can happen from long stems and hard spurs that are next to the fruit, so when the pickers are twisting off the apple, they might damage the fruit without realizing it," he said. There's no easy solution to this problem, but growers should supervise pickers closely.

"This might be a case where you pay the pickers to slow down because it isn't about getting the fruit off as soon as possible, but rather taking time like picking peaches," Watkins said.

Storage isn't an issue in Minnesota, where high demand means no time for storage. There is a similar market demand in New York, but Watkins and other Cornell specialists have come up with storage conditions to stay ahead of the game. The current recommendation is to start with the delay treatment at 50° F for a week and then store the fruit at 38° F in air. Apples have been found to last more than six months.



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