

Best Recommendations for Organic Orchards in Zone 3 Humid Regions

The following pools are compilations based on our experiences in Northeastern Vermont zone 3 under certified organic management over an 18 year period. Although there is a much larger body of choices with a reasonable chance of success, the following are our favorites to date. This should be considered a template for the beginning planting, which we feel offers the best chance of success. Variations are encouraged, but this initial set should insure a baseline income or the sober establishment of a large home orchard.

This list (table 14) considers the commercial organic grower, large or small, not the home orchardist. The varieties listed offer the greatest income potential based on both the fruit's perceived appeal and its ease of management. It is comprised of less than 40 varieties. Included in the study is a second spreadsheet (table 15) which includes 127 apple and pear varieties for consideration for smaller operations or those with higher tolerance for blemishes and workload. Furthermore, particular merits of the apples in this expanded list may outweigh the effort to individual farmers.

Also of note is the growth in the cider market. This opens many possibilities for orchardists who wish to use organic farming or low impact methods, since the end product allows some degree of fruit blemish. This also allows growers to produce a product attuned to flavor characteristics instead of outward appearance, texture or disease resistance. Likely all of the 127 selections in spreadsheet 6 could be grown and marketed in zone 3 for fresh and hard cider (or high end processing), particularly in the certified organic market. It could do so within a low-input, low management system.

We must remind readers that these recommendations represent a slice in time, regarding our experience to date. The list relays cultivars we are confident in suggesting for your orchards. There are many that will fit better, and some here that may prove difficult in some areas, but all selections have proved very acceptable at our farm, both in managing and in sales.

Concerning disease resistant apples, many universities have been actively seeking candidates. Cornell University and the PRI program (Perdue, Rutgers, and the University of Illinois) are examples. These offer possibilities for many organic orchardists. Unfortunately, few are being bred with the coldest regions in mind. This of course was part of the reasoning for the study you are reading, its utility in the screening of a large pre-existing body of cultivars. It appears that plenty of heirloom varieties, cider selections, and formerly lesser known fruits hold the possibility of good financial return. This latter potential is largely due to a fairly recent interest in alternatives like organic food, historical varieties, and the hard cider resurgence.