

The Cider Press: Foggy Ridge Cider in Dugspur, Virginia

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While the American hard cider community is thriving in the Pacific Northwest, the East Coast shouldn't be overlooked. In fact, East Coast cideries are turning out some of the best ciders in the country right now. One of our favorites is **Foggy Ridge Cider** in Dugspur, Virginia. We recently caught up with **Diane Flynt**, the orchardist (as well as picker, presser, and cidemaker) at Foggy Ridge to discuss what makes her ciders so unique.

Foggy Ridge is a particularly interesting orchard. Can you tell us a bit about the farm and how it shapes your ciders?

Every farmer who makes a beverage, whether it's wine or cider, hopes the finished product will reflect the site. Our orchards are at 3000 feet elevation, so we have cold, snowy winters. But we're in Virginia, so we get warm sunny summers. Apples love cold winters and lots of sun, so we're an ideal site for fruit. **Virginia has a long tradition of apple growing**—nearby Bent Mountain produced the Newtown Pippin apple that Queen Victoria loved so much, it was the only agricultural product sent to England with no tax.

Our fruit is highly flavored with pronounced acidity. The later apples are especially complex with many layers of ginger and tropical fruit notes. As a cidemaker, **my first job is to get this great fruit in the bottle without messing it up!** That said, I would characterize the Foggy Ridge cider style as balanced with pronounced fruit aromas and complex flavors. You are always going to find a **strong acid line** in our ciders, even the fruitier blends. I also am a firm believer in blending cider from many batches of individually fermented varieties.

Foggy Ridge has three orchards—the Old Orchard was our original test orchard with over 30 varieties. It is on an east facing slope above Rock House Creek—mist rises from that creek most mornings and bathes the side of Long Mountain with fog. In this orchard I experimented with classic English cider apples like Dabinett, Kingston Black, Tremlett's Bitter, Stoke Red and Yarlington Mill. But the real focus at Foggy Ridge is American heirlooms like Harrison, Ashmead's Kernel and Newtown Pippin. Our two production orchards include our most successful cider apples as well as the Hewe's Crab, a crabapple that Thomas Jefferson used for cidemaking.

What made you decide to start producing cider?

I grew up in a very small town in Georgia, from a farming family. Although my Dad was the first generation off the farm, he had a keen interest in the natural world. I've always liked growing things, trees in particular. I still drive by the first home I ever purchased in Charlotte, NC to check on the maple tree that I planted in 1979. I knew I wouldn't live in that spot for long, but I just had to plant a tree. My career goal was always to have a "last career" that involved agriculture. When we found our farm here in the southern Appalachians, the site dictated fruit trees.



[Photographs courtesy of Foggy Ridge Cider]



Young Cox's Orange Pippin trees in the North Orchard at Foggy Ridge

Can you describe the cider community in Virginia right now?

Cider is growing in Virginia! I am a member of the Virginia Wine Board, the governor-appointed board that distributes marketing and research funds allocated to the wine industry by the state. Agriculture is the largest segment of VA's economy, and wine (and cider!) making are the fastest growing part of agriculture. Foggy Ridge and [Albemarle Ciderworks](#) are now "old timers"; this year we are joined by [Castle Hill Cider](#) which will release their first cider this summer. There are two more cidemakers in the application process and I think this growth is very good for cider. We will inspire apple growers to grow more cider fruit, and we will keep experimenting with cider apples in our own orchards. My husband says I am too old to plant more apples, but I ripped out 90 trees last year to change varieties.

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What makes Foggy Ridge such a good cider for pairing with food?

Good acidity always pairs well with food. Lower alcohol also contributes to good food pairings, especially with cheese and spicy food. And while well made cider reflects "fruit", good cider is not the fruit bomb that some wines are these days.

Your Sweet Stayman is a particularly unique cider. Can you tell us a bit about it?

Sweet Stayman is less than half the sweetness level of commercial cider blends like Crispin and Woodchuck, and about what you would find in a dry Riesling. I pair Sweet Stayman with the types of dishes you would pair with northern European white wines that have more retained sugar, good acidity and lots of fruit. Spicy dishes are classic, such as Asian or Indian dishes. **I like Sweet Stayman with spicy buffalo chili that we make with meat from the local buffalo farm.** And I use Sweet Stayman when cooking dishes inspired by Normandy, like squab roasted in butter then finished with cider and cream. Very French!

Besides your own cider, what are you drinking right now?

As a sparkling beverage maker, I always like to try sparkling products from other regions. We enjoyed a sparkling pinot noir from Austria last night. I'm a huge fan of the beers at [Full Steam](#) brewery in Durham, NC. [Sean Wilson's](#) inspired "farm to pint" approach results in some amazing brews, like his Carver made from NC-grown sweet potatoes.



Often overlooked by cider-makers, the Pomme Gris, an heirloom apple variety with a spicy aroma, adds a unique complexity to the Foggy Ridge First Fruit cider

That said, I drink lots of cider. The Maloney's cider from [West County](#) is wonderful, especially Redfield. I wish I had a block of Redfield apples in our orchard! I also like Chuck Shelton's cider at Albemarle Ciderworks, located down the mountain from Foggy Ridge near Charlottesville. Chuck is a talented cidemaker who grows many of the same varieties as Foggy Ridge, but creates very different, and quite pleasing, blends. Steve Wood's cider at Farnum Hill is totally different from Foggy Ridge but wonderful, especially when I pull out a great sheep's milk cheese. And I wish [Wandering Aengus](#) were closer so I could drink more of Nick Gunn's well made cider.

The cider landscape in America is rapidly expanding and changing. Where do you see American cider down the road?

I hope cidemakers stay true to making good quality cider from cider apples—I would hate to see new cidemakers take the "industrial cider" approach with chaptalized juice and watered down cider. Over half of what is available on grocery store shelves as "cider" really isn't cider at all—it is to cider as a wine cooler is to wine. My hope is that the cidemakers who are planting trees and making cider today will continue the tradition of crafting cider from well chosen apples.

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Tasting Foggy Ridge Cider

Foggy Ridge ciders are sold in North Carolina, Virginia and Washington DC, with plans to expand into South Carolina and Georgia soon. While the best place to pick up a bottle is right from the Foggy Ridge farm, there are some Virginia retailers that will ship out of state.

If you are lucky enough to get your hands on a bottle, make sure to try Foggy Ridge's **First Fruit**, an aromatic, semi-dry cider with nice mineral characteristics along with notes of preserved lemon, pear, and green apple. First Fruit is an amazingly versatile cider that will stand up to most food pairings but works particularly well with washed rind cheeses.

If you prefer a more full-bodied cider then try the **Sweet Stayman**. With 2.3% residual sugar, the Sweet Stayman will compliment any spice-forward dishes from Buffalo wings to Thai curries.



Finally, for the cider purist, Foggy Ridge offers their **Serious Cider**. Produced with a higher concentration of bittersharp apples, the prominent tannins and dry finish in the Serious Cider works as an excellent Champagne alternative and pairs especially well with delicate pork dishes and flaky fish.

About the author: Chris Lehault is a homebrewer and cider connoisseur. He also blogs about beverage culture at IDrunkThat.com.