

THE ULTIMATE WESTERN GARDEN GUIDE

FROM OUR GARDEN EXPERTS

Sunset

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You'll like these apples

There's no arguing that we have the best wine and beer in the country. Now the Bay Area is juicing up on craft cider.

FOR MORE THAN a century—before wine grapes became the agricultural cash cow of the region—Sonoma and Mendocino Counties were lousy with apples. Hundreds of small orchards flooded the Bay Area with enough fresh fruit (and juice and sauce) to keep the doctor away for a long time. While most farmers have traded their Gravensteins for grapes, a few intrepid mom-and-pop producers have started taking things in a boozy new direction, using heirloom varieties to make hard cider. The dry, faintly fizzy brew is showing up on menus around the Bay Area bar scene.



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Fermented apple juice comes in all tastes and sizes at San Francisco's only cider bar, Upcider.

SAN FRANCISCO | Upcider One of only a few cider bars in the country, this low-lit lounge in the Tenderloin has an extensive list with more than 100 bottles of imported and local hard ciders, including the tart and tangy Murray's Cyder, from Petaluma. Sonoma's single-varietal Apple Sauced Cider is made with 100 percent Gravensteins and shows off the fruit's dry earthiness, which makes a great pairing with the kitchen's spicy lamb sliders. \$; 1160 Polk St.; upcidersf.com

SUNNYVALE | Rabbit's Foot Meadery Tucked away in one of Silicon Valley's squeaky-clean suburbs is this Old World-style pub with six taps primed to flow the favorite drinks of druids and Vikings. Owner-brewer Mike Faul also dabbles in apples, combining fermented Sierra Foot-hills juice with honey to make an ancient drink called cyser. 1246 Birchwood Dr.; rabbitsfootmeadery.com

SEBASTOPOL | Gypsy Cafe On the second Friday of each month, this downtown cafe hands the bar over to a local cider house to pour tastes and pints. Come back in May, when the host will be Tilted Shed, whose tannic, complex ciders (like the January Barbecue Smoked Cider) can do wonders for aged cheese and salumi. \$; 162 N. Main St./State 116; gypsy-cafe.com

TOMALES | AppleGarden Farm Why sit on a barstool when you can go straight to the source? Jan and Louis Lee welcome visitors to their orchard in the middle of Point Reyes dairy country to see the apple press and taste hard cider straight off the tiny, hand-operated bottling line. Book a stay at their three-room cottage (from \$225; applegardencottage.com), and wake up to a breakfast made with eggs from the resident chickens. Tour \$4; call for appointment, 707/878-9152. —ALASTAIR BLAND