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The real Johnny Appleseed: A legacy evolved and honored

The lore of Johnny Appleseed, real name John Chapman, separating myth from reality

Updated: 8:10 PM EDT Sep 23, 2024

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LEOMINSTER, Mass. — In Leominster, Massachusetts, the birthplace of Johnny Appleseed, a study revealed that 42% of Americans believe John Chapman — Johnny Appleseed — was a myth, not a real person. However, Chapman was very much real, says Mark Bodanza, **author of "Johnny Appleseed: The Man Behind the Folklore."**

Two-hundred and fifty years after Johnny Appleseed's birth, Leominster cherishes community-owned **Sholan Farms**. Initially planned for housing, the 167-acre land is now open space that the people of Leominster can enjoy. The farm typically opens their "you-pick" orchard every September, but 2024 was not a typical year. Climate change, diseases like fire blight, and an April freeze disrupted their "you-pick" tradition, pushing Sholan Farms to adapt.

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Leslie Duthie, a volunteer at [New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill](#), explains fire blight's destructive impact on apple trees: "Our warm moist springs are what spur fire blight and which cause the trees to become infected... The bees actually spread the fire blight from tree to tree through the blossoms."

Growing apples is not as idyllic as Disney portrayed. Seeds from apples like Red Delicious won't replicate the parent fruit due to genetic variations.

When [fire blight wiped out the orchard](#) at New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill, the team sprung into action, harvesting scion wood from old trees and grafting them to disease resistant rootstock. The new orchard was planted three years ago and boasts 260 trees and 120 different apple varieties.

The orchard celebrates unique antique varieties like "Opalescent" and "Wolf River." The team says keeping these antique varieties going is important not just for consumers, but for the importance of biodiversity and resistance against future diseases.

Looking to go apple picking this fall? Check out this [map of apple orchards](#) in Massachusetts.

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