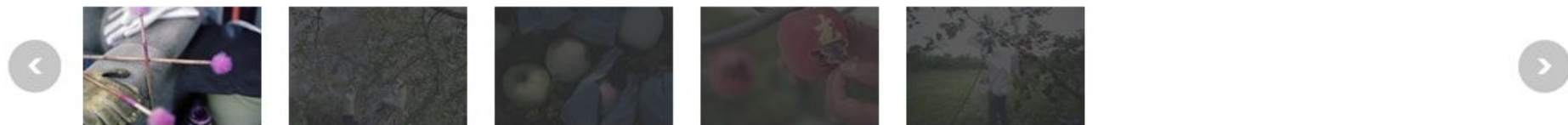


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## How Do you Like Them (Hand-Pollinated, Stenciled) Apples

Monday, October 04, 2010



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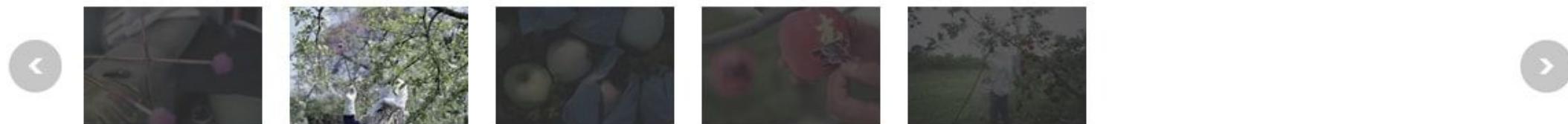
Photographer Jane Alden Stevens traveled to the Tsugaru region of Aomori prefecture in Japan to document the work of apple farmers. The intensive labor starts in spring with blossom thinning, in order to insure a larger fruit. Farmers climb ladders to carefully pluck the four outer blooms, leaving only the center one behind. Stevens writes:

"What amazed me most about the process that the Japanese use to grow apples was how labor-intensive it is. From the time a blossom is set, an apple can be touched by human hands at least ten times before it is harvested. When I asked why many farmers are cutting down their orchards and abandoning this method of raising fruit, some held their hands up, wiggled their fingers, and replied, "Not enough hands!"

Seen here are tools for hand-pollination including wands, gloves, and a bottle containing the pollen. A magenta dye is added to the pollen so workers can see which blossoms have been touched. To see more [apple farming images](#) from Stevens, click [here](#).

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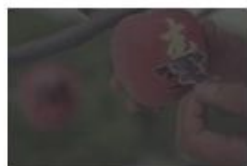
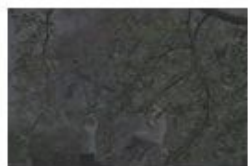
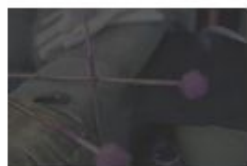
Workers apply the pollen with wands tipped with ostrich feathers.

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In June, while apples are still less than an inch around, imperfect fruit is discarded, and the best apples are bagged. The apple bags are made of a special opaque paper and lined with a translucent, colored wax paper. The bags are wired shut so the apple receives no sunlight for three months or more. This keeps out pests, extends the storage life and flavor of the fruit, and leaves apples a creamy white color. In the fall, farmers again climb the ladders to carefully remove the outer bag. "The color of the wax paper -- red, green, light blue, dark blue -- affects the fruit's ultimate color," Stevens says.

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When all bags are removed, the apples are creamy white. Then silver mats are placed under the trees to reflect the sun upward, tinting the bottom of the apples to match the top. Sometimes, stencils are applied to the pale skin to leave impressions as the apples ripen.

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In early fall, workers remove the light-tight outer bags (seen in gray) from the apples, leaving on the translucent inner bags (seen in red) for a few days to toughen up the skin.

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