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[Home](#) / [Jersey Living](#)

Making the Switch to Switchel

What the heck is switchel? The colonial-era drink is making a comeback, thanks to a couple from Mendham.

By [Marlaina Cockcroft](#) | September 11, 2015 | Appears in the [September 2015 issue](#)



Photo courtesy of Cide Road

“What the heck is switchel?” reads the banner at [Cide Road’s](#) tasting events. Fair question, if you’re not familiar with the Colonial-era drink combining apple-cider vinegar, maple syrup and ginger. Cide Road founder/CEO Kevin Duffy of Mendham was among the uninitiated, until he got a taste of switchel at a general store in Vermont.

“We sort of got blown away by how refreshing it was,” says Duffy, who had exited his sales job to look for an entrepreneurial opportunity. He decided switchel would be his next venture.

Duffy and his wife and co-founder, Hilary La Forge, experimented with switchel recipes for three months, then hired a company to commercially formulate their drink. Nearly a year after launching Cide Road, their switchel—made at [Wayne County Foods](#) in Irvington and priced at \$3.49 a bottle—is available in specialty, health food and grocery stores from Maine to Florida, and online at [cideroad.com](#). It comes in blueberry, cherry and original flavors. Cide Road is developing a fourth flavor for the fall, along with other vinegar-based drinks.

Old-time farmers drank switchel because well water wasn’t always safe. Today, Duffy says, people drink apple cider vinegar for its presumed health benefits, including help with weight loss and heart health (though studies aren’t conclusive). Some say vinegar’s acidity relieves stomach issues, and the ginger helps stomach and



Duffy admits that switchel's ingredients, listed individually, may not sound all that promising, but he says skeptics are quick to come around. "It's a sweet, tart, gingery thing. It's a very surprising taste."

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