

far-out FESTIVALS

By Theresa Gawlas Medoff

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You've got your apple festivals and your strawberry festivals. There are brew fests, wine festivals and festivals featuring every imaginable kind of music. Americans seem to love any excuse to throw a party. But some communities are more inventive than others when it comes to picking a theme for their bash. We've rounded up some of the more unusual reasons that people in the Mid-Atlantic have found for gathering a festive crowd.

CHOWING DOWN

Yes, apple festivals can be found all over this region, but the folks in Bridgeville, Delaware, make theirs unique by pairing the classic fall fruit—grown locally at T.S. Smith and Sons Farm—with scrapple, made in town since 1926 by RAPA Scrapple. Now, you might ask, what is scrapple? It's a meat product that combines pork scraps and trimmings

with cornmeal and flour to form a loaf. It's often served sliced and fried as a breakfast meat.

Ah, but what else can you do with scrapple? Well, the **Bridgeville Apple Scrapple Festival**, held annually in October, challenges cooks to come up with ideas in its Scrapple Recipe Contest. If you have no interest in cooking, enter the Scrapple Chunkin' contest to see who can throw scrapple the farthest or the Ladies' Skillet Toss for the longest-distance toss of an eight-inch frying pan.

Across the bay in West Cape May, New Jersey, they're celebrating the lima bean, which had been the number-one crop in this farming area into the early 1990s. And, thanks to West Cape May's Rea Farm, you can still purchase the local legume at the **Lima Bean Festival**, held annually on the Saturday before Columbus Day.

There aren't any offbeat lima bean contests at the festival, but you can buy lima bean-themed pottery, T-shirts and jewelry and taste some unusual lima bean-flavored foods, including lima bean ice cream and cookies (they're mostly sugar cookies with a little lima bean thrown in, confesses festival coordinator and cookie baker Sharon Flanagan). Occasionally, one of the bands even plays an ode to the lowly lima bean.

It might not be surprising that a town in Maryland celebrates the crab, but in Crisfield, eating the crabs is not enough. The southernmost town on the Eastern Shore has been hosting the original National Hard Crab Derby for 71 years now, spawning copycat (or copy-crab) races around the country.

Actually, there are two crab races during the **National Hard Crab Derby and Fair**, which is held in the days leading up to Labor Day. The

first race, the Governor's Cup, pits 50 local blue crabs, one for each state, in a competition to see which crab will make its way off the slanted race board first. The National Hard Crab Derby is open to anyone willing to pony up \$5 to adopt a crab for the race. Hundreds of crabs compete in multiple heats. For humans,

there are boat-docking contests and competitions in crab picking and crab cooking. Then, there's the pageant; and, really, who wouldn't want to be named Miss Crustacean? In Suffolk, Virginia, a four-day festival every October celebrates the peanut, a crop grown in the state at least since the 1800s. Back in the 1940s, the **Suffolk Peanut Fest** comprised a parade, dances and balls, and the coronation of a queen. Now it's now more akin to a county

fair, but the festival's namesake still gets its due with a peanut butter sculpting contest. Now that's an unheralded art!

Pennsylvania may be the champion of food fests, but we have an affinity for the mid-August **Pittston Tomato Festival**, which includes the crowd favorite Tomato Fights à la Boñul, Spain's La Tomatina, with participants throwing squashed tomatoes at their friends and neighbors.



Bridgeville Apple Scrapple Festival
COURTESY OF MICHAEL GILDEN/
VISITSOUTHERNDELAWARE.COM



Pittston Tomato Festival



Lima Bean Festival



Crab racing at the National Hard Crab Derby and Fair
PHOTO BY PATTY HANCOCK



Winner of the peanut butter sculpting contest at the Suffolk Peanut Fest
COURTESY OF SUFFOLK PEANUT FEST



The re-created “run out” scene is a highlight of Blobfest.
COURTESY OF BRANDYWINEVALLEY.COM



A sculpture of a “Martian spaceship” is a tourist attraction in Mars, Pennsylvania.
COURTESY OF NASA



HONFest
COURTESY OF VISIT BALTIMORE



HONFest
COURTESY OF VISIT BALTIMORE



Annual Blackbeard Pirate Festival
COURTESY OF HAMPTON CONVENTION & VISITOR BUREAU

BLOBS AND MARTIANS AND PIRATES, OH MY!

Phoenixville, Pennsylvania’s **Blobfest** got its start 20 years ago when a small group of B-movie aficionados decided to re-create a famous scene from the 1958 movie *The Blob*, which was filmed in and around Phoenixville. In the movie, a huge jelly-like mass from outer space attacks the town’s movie house, The Colonial Theatre, causing the panicked patrons to flee. The re-creation of that scene is still the central attraction of the annual festival at the Colonial. Tickets to the event, available online, sell out within two minutes, according to Patron Services Director LuAnn Roth. (Tickets go on sale at 12:30 p.m. Eastern time on May 31 for this year’s July 12 theater run-out; the festival takes place July 12–14.)

Prior to the theater run-out, ticket-holders enjoy a variety show featuring live music, a screening

of short films made in tribute to classic sci-fi movies, and the popular Miss Blobfest Contest. During the remainder of the weekend, attendees—often costumed as outer space creatures—catch screenings of *The Blob* and other 1950s-era sci-fi horror films and patronize vendors selling appropriately themed wares.

Over in Mars, Pennsylvania, 25 miles north of Pittsburgh, they celebrate—what else?—the planet Mars. The town’s name was bestowed upon it long ago by the astronomy-loving wife of the town’s primary landowner, who thought it a suitable shortening of their last name, Marshall, according to mayor Gregg Hartung. The town of 1,500 has embraced its celestial connection not only by placing a disc-shaped five-foot-diameter spaceship in the town park but also by launching the educational festival **Mars New Year**, celebrated every other year—every 687 days to be exact—to coincide

with the new year on the planet Mars. This year the new year on the planet falls on March 23, and to mark the occasion, the town will hold a VIP Event and Blast-Off Dinner March 21 and a STEAM Education Breakfast for students March 22.

The Mars New Year festival itself, which is open to the public, has been scheduled for May 31 to June 2 to take advantage of warmer weather. Attractions include a sci-fi costume contest, food trucks and fun kids’ activities, but the real focus is on learning about Mars and space exploration. The borough collaborates with NASA (yes, that NASA), which sends scientists and astronauts to the festival to deliver talks and give demonstrations.

Hampton, Virginia, in the late 1600s and early 1700s had a problem: pirates. The lawless marauders terrorized area waterways, seizing cargo ships and capturing goods, sailors and ships.

Most menacing of all was one Captain Edward Teach, a.k.a. Blackbeard the Pirate. These days, the town celebrates the demise of Blackbeard, who was killed in a violent sea battle in 1718 and his head impaled on a pole near the mouth of Hampton Creek as a warning to other miscreants.

The **Annual Blackbeard Pirate Festival**, celebrating 20 years in 2019, is more cheerful than its origins might indicate. Held the first weekend of June each year, the festival features not only a Blackbeard reenactor but also some 300 others in period costume. Activities include a replica of Blackbeard’s pirate camp, street skirmishes between pirate and militia reenactors, and a reenactment in Hampton Harbor of the sea battle that finished off Blackbeard, featuring two full-scale replica vessels.

JUST PLAIN FUN

As festivals go, the **Bearding Man Festival** in Shippensburg, Pennsylvania, is pretty small; fewer than 200 attended in 2018. But we just couldn’t resist including it. Where else can you go for competitions such as Best Fake Beard (men, women and children welcome); Best Partial Beard (think goatees and sideburns); and Best Natural Beard under 2 inches, from 2 to 6 inches, from 6 to 10 inches, and over 10 inches (yikes!). The granddaddy of them all, the festival’s best in show, is named Lord of the Beard. Men come from as far as California and Wisconsin to claim the coveted title.

The men might have the Bearding Man Festival, but women can look forward each June to **HONFest**, held in Baltimore’s Hampden neighborhood, a working-class neighborhood in the 1960s that once was home to a host of hons. “Hon” is

short for “honey,” of course, a term of endearment among those 1960s-era Hampden women who wore sky-high beehive hairdos, cat’s-eye glasses, Lycra leggings and animal prints.

HONfest was founded 25 years ago by Denise Whiting, owner of Café HON and its adjacent gift shop, where you can buy everything needed to transform yourself into a hon. If you come to the festival decked out, be sure to gather for the HONdreds of Hons group photo and, perhaps, to compete for the title of Baltimore’s Best HON. To grab the crown, you not only need to look the part (The HONfest motto is, “The higher the hair, the closer to God!”) but also be fluent in “Bawlmerese” and have a great personality.

Is your calendar for the year full yet? We hope not, because you can read about even more festivals online at AAA.com/world.