



Swan River Gardens

How to Grow Apples

One of the easiest ways to take control over the quality of the food your family eats is to grow it yourself. And apples are a simple fruit to grow that will reward you with a good crop year after year. You can enjoy varieties for fresh eating, baking, applesauce or even fresh cider! If you have a proper root cellar you can even select varieties that are good keepers and will stay crisp for months.

Selecting Your Apple Trees: How smart you are to come to a real garden center like Swan River Gardens to buy your fruit trees! You understand what a long term investment a fruit tree is and how important it is to get the best value for your money. Local expertise is very important. Our Swan River Gardens experts select varieties that will not only survive in Montana but also thrive here. You will not find trees for many supermarket apple varieties for sale at reputable garden centers like Swan River Gardens. The tree or more often, the flower buds, are simply not hardy enough on varieties like Granny Smith or Delicious.

You cannot grow a single apple tree. All apple varieties sold today require a pollinator; none are what we call self-fertile. Pollination refers to the exchange of pollen either between trees or among blossoms on the same tree. Cross-pollinating means that two different types of blossoms from two different trees must be used in order to get fruit. For example a Macintosh cannot pollinate another Macintosh. Another variety such as Wealthy is needed. Additionally you need to pair varieties that bloom at approximately the same time so the bees have blossoms to work with on both trees. You will see that Swan River Gardens' apple trees have color coded strip tags that help you pair varieties correctly. The terms *early*, *mid* or *late* season are used to describe the bloom and fruiting times for apples so look for these terms if you are selecting varieties elsewhere. Match an early season with another early season, a mid season with a mid and so on. Trees will not care if you plant one this year and its mate the next. Just be sure to keep track of which type you have planted.

Caring For Your Apple Trees: Be sure to pick up the Swan River Gardens handout on Fruit Trees for general information on growing fruit trees.

You should not have to do any pruning on a newly planted apple tree for the first two or three seasons. Like any tree however, watch for problem branches and deal with them when they are small. This includes crossed branches, damaged branches or ones growing at too steep an angle to the trunk.

Apple trees do have a unique growth habit that you must understand to prune them correctly. On apple trees most of the blossom will appear on what are called fruiting spurs. These spurs are short, compact branches that will grow less than four inches long. On most apple varieties these spurs produce a *fruit bud* on alternate years. If they fruit one year, the next year they will produce only a stem with no fruit or a *vegetative bud*. The next year they will fruit again. This results in a stem that has a zigzag appearance. When you are pruning, it is important you recognize what branches are producing fruit and which are not. The crooked, zigzag of a fruiting spur looks much different from a straight, never going to fruit branch like a waterspout. After you remove all the non fruiting branches, you can then select which of the fruiting branches you will remove to shape the tree. Like all fruit trees you should be shaping the tree to have an open center to allow sun and air to get in.

The apple varieties available at Swan River Gardens are listed on the reverse of this sheet. Be sure to chat with one of our experts anytime you have questions about growing fruit in the Flathead Valley. We are happy to help you start growing your own fruit.

2011 Season Apple Varieties

Early Apples:

State Fair on M-7 semi dwarf rootstock. State Fair is a popular apple that is good for cooking and fresh eating. Zone 3.

Lodi on M-7 semi dwarf rootstock. Lodi is a yellow apple that ripens very early in Mid-July. Crisp and tart, excellent keeper, good for pies and sauce. Zone 4.

Zestar on standard rootstock. Zestar is a early apple that is crisp and juicy, great for fresh eating but the apples also stay crisp after long refrigeration. Tart flavor with a hint of brown sugar. Zone 4.

Mid season Apples:

Honeycrisp on M-7 semi dwarf precocious rootstock. Honeycrisp is one of the most popular apples. It is the best for fresh eating but also works great for pies. Zone 4.

Macintosh on M-7 semi dwarf rootstock. Macintosh is probably the most widely know apple variety. It has been around for a long time. Good for fresh eating, cooking and keeping. Zone 4.

Sweet Sixteen on m-7 semi dwarf rootstock. Sweet Sixteen is good for both fresh eating and dessert. Zone 4.

Mid to Late season Apples:

Honeygold on M-7 semi dwarf rootstock. Honeygold is the closest we can dependably grow to a Yellow Delicious. It is good for eating, cooking and dessert. Zone 4.

Late season Apples:

Red Regent on M-7 semi dwarf rootstock. Red Regent is good for eating, cooking and dessert. Zone 4.

Red Fujii on standard rootstock. Red Fujii has red pin stripes over red, flesh is cream colored. Ripens late October. Stores well, good for cooking and eating. Zone 5. Not for all parts of the valley.

Crabapples can be used as pollinators for early to mid season apple varieties. They are highly ornamental and the two offered by Swan River Gardens produce very usable fruit.

Fruiting Crabapples:

Dolgo on Standard rootstock. Dolgo produces sweet crabapples that make a great jam or jelly. The flowers are white. Zone 3.

A quick primer on rootstock types: Most modern fruit trees are reproduced through 'clonal propagation'. By doing this many copies of a tree can be produced by grafting small pieces of the parent tree, called the 'scion' to 'rootstock'. Along with factors that home gardeners do not need to worry about, the choice of rootstock has some influence on the fruit production and size of the tree along with disease resistance. It is the scion wood however, that produces the fruit we are after. Below are the rootstocks used on the trees we carry. Note they are **not** interchangeable, we cannot order a tree on a rootstock different that what the grower offers.

Standard rootstock - Grows to 100% of the tree's potential size, for most apple trees this is about 20' high and wide. The best winter hardiness and adaptability to soil types. Roots are deep and well anchored. Typically takes up to 8 years to produce significant fruit.

M-7 semi dwarf rootstock – Grows to about 50% of the tree's potential size, for most apple trees this means about 12' high and wide. Good winter hardiness, prefers well drained loam or clay loam. Typically produces fruit in 4-6 years.

M-7 precocious semi dwarf rootstock – Precocious rootstock is a relatively new development and is capable of producing fruit in less years, sometimes as few as 3. Trees will grow to a height and width of 10-12'. Good winter hardiness, prefers well drained loam or clay loam.

Additional suggested reading: The Backyard Orchardist by Stella Otto