

Grow Your Own: Cooking Apples

Fact Sheet

Which Variety: Bramley is a traditional and vigorous apple tree, but if you wish to avoid spraying, there are other apple trees which have a better disease resistance, such as Lord Derby, Annie Elizabeth or Edward VII.

Which Tree: All apples grow as a graft onto a rootstock. It is the type of rootstock which decides the size of the tree. The most widely available apple rootstocks are M27, M9, M26, and MM106, producing trees of about 1.8m(6ft), 3.0m(10ft), 3.6m(12ft), and 5.4m(18ft) tall respectively. Select the size of the tree according to the size of your garden. M27 and M9 need good soil conditions; the ground should be clear of weeds and grass and they need permanent staking and watering in dry conditions. M26 and MM106 are suitable for a wide range of soils including grassed orchards; they are less prone to drying out and only need staking for the first 5 years.

Pollinators: Most trees need to be pollinated by different apple trees nearby that are in flower at the same time. In gardens there are usually enough trees around for successful pollination, but if not, buy different apple trees from the same pollination group. Crab apples will pollinate other apples. See www.keepers-nursery.co.uk for more information.

Buying trees: Buy 1 year-old (maiden) bare root trees from a specialist nursery, or trees in pots from local garden centres.

Where and when to plant: Apples like a warm, sheltered, sunny spot with no frost pockets. Plant bare-root trees in December-March, or container-grown trees at other times.

Soil Preparation: On the whole it is best not to change the soil around the tree too much from the surrounding area. If your soil is very heavy you should mix in some sharp sand and organic matter. If it is very sandy you should mix in organic matter.

Planting: Dig a hole twice as big as the roots. Loosen the soil at the bottom and sides of hole. Put in a stake with 2ft in the ground. Plant trees at the same depth as they had been before being lifted. The soil mark should be easy to see. The join between the rootstock and graft (which is usually clearly visible as a kink in the stem) should never be buried under the soil. When filling in the hole make sure that the soil gets all around the roots. Tread in well and water thoroughly after planting. Tie the tree to the stake with proper tree ties. Mulch the area under the tree to keep clear of grass and weeds.

Pruning : Prune each year in December. Cut out any dead or diseased wood and any crossing branches. Cut back all new growth by about 1/3. Make all the cuts just above an outside facing bud so that any new growth tends to open out the tree.

After planting, prune maidens to just above the 4th bud.

