

HOME & GARDEN

Dwarf apple trees for area home orchards

By PAT LEUCHTMAN
Leisure Columnist

Ever since Eve the apple has been the favorite fruit to eat in the hand, in a pie, sauce, turnover and stuffed inside a goose with sage and prunes. Apples are red, golden or green, sweet or tart and delicious raw or cooked. There is an apple for every purpose and every taste.

They are also easy to grow. With the popularization of dwarf and semi-dwarf trees there is no reason that any homeowner cannot have his own little orchard. (To bear fruit, apples must be cross-pollinated, that is two varieties must be planted near each other.) Dwarf trees are easy to prune, easy to spray (and even an organic gardener like me will want to use a dormant oil spray) and best of all, easy to harvest. A semi-dwarf tree will not grow much beyond 10 feet tall, yet the fruit is full size and the harvest ample.

Another plus to planting dwarf trees is that they will start bearing within two or three years of planting. Although they are not as long lived as standard trees they will be fruitful for years.

There is plenty of variety in dwarf apples, too. Since they take up so little space you can plant three or four types enabling you to spread out your harvest over two or three months. You could start with an early apple like Summer Scarlet which ripens in mid-August, or the Red Astrachan which is tart and delicious for eating out of hand or cooked.

The McIntosh is possibly the most popular eating apple in the whole United States. It ripens in September and like all early apples it will keep well for only a comparatively short length of time.

Delicious apples seem to be the only apple sold in New York delis and at 40 or 50 cents a shot, the homeowner can see what a gold mine a single tree can be. Delicious apples ripen in October.

Last fall, Debra Lovett of Mohawk Orchards told me that the secret of a really good apple pie was not just to use a good pie apple like the R.I. Greening or Northern Spy, but to use two or three varieties at once. Another reason to grow several apple trees



Deutsches Lechen

Besides the standard varieties J.E. Miller Nurseries, Canandaigua, N.Y. 14224, offers semi-dwarf "antique" apples. Though no longer grown commercially these varieties have distinctive flavors and textures that are a real treat. I have a Sheepnose apple growing next to my garden and a friend remarked that the dark red skin was rather unhealthy looking and it is shaped like a lopsided Delicious, but it is wonderful for baking.

Whatever apples you finally choose, and remember you must choose at least two different types, a careful planting will insure you many years of abundant harvest.

Dig a hole for your tree that is large enough to accommodate the roots without crowding. You may want to enrich the soil with compost because apple trees favor a soil rich in organic matter.

Planting holes can be prepared before your trees arrive because once you have them in hand you will want to get them in the ground as soon as possible. Check the roots and if any seem broken or damaged, snip that part off with sharp shears. Then make sure the roots

are moist and kept moist by sprinkling them gently with a hose, or by letting them rest briefly in a pail of water.

Spread the roots out in the hole and start to shovel in the earth, tamping it down as you go. All air pockets should be removed. When the hole is nearly full, give the tree a good deep watering. This will also help settle the soil around the tree roots. Finish filling the hole, but take care that the graft is above the soil line.

A dwarf tree is created by grafting a standard tree variety onto a special dwarf rootstock. It is this rootstock that keeps the tree from growing tall. The grafted joint is usually recognizable by a bend or knob. If the graft is placed below the soil level, it is possible that it will send out its own shoots and this will not result in the crunchy Pippins or Baldwins that you are craving.

If you choose good quality nursery stock and plant your tree carefully, you are more than halfway to having your own apple in your hand and a pie cooling in the window.

Home buying the future looks better



HERE'S THE ANSWER

By ANDY LANG
AP Newsfeatures

Q — Many years ago I used a large drum sander to sand a floor before refinishing it. I recall that I had a lot of trouble controlling the big machine, which tended to pull forward as I was using it. I am a small person weighing only 120 pounds. I have to do a similar job again and wonder whether there is something I should know to give me better control of the

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