



Winter in the Orchard—Gathering Grafting Wood

It's easy to graft an apple tree—and winter is the time to gather grafting wood from your favorite apple trees.

Not only have we lost over 80% of the apple varieties unique to North America, we have also lost “apple culture”—the skills and habits of propagating and growing trees. That’s the bad news. The good news is that it’s easy to increase your “apple literacy” and learn to graft and grow your very own apple trees. Is there is an apple on your Grandparents’ farm you want in your own back yard?

Read on, and learn what you can do to save uncommon apples:

What is Grafting

If you plant an apple seed, you will get an apple tree but it will be a new variety, the combination of each parent’s DNA. To reproduce your favorite uncommon apple, you must graft a bud or dormant wood from that tree onto rootstock.

Dormant Grafting

The simplest grafting consists of marrying the living plant tissue of a dormant stick of wood from your favorite tree (called scion wood) to a root stock you have selected for size, disease resistance and hardiness for your planting region.

Root Stocks

There are as many root stocks as there are breakfast cereals—keep it simple and purchase a tried and true root stock for your planting zone and for the size tree you want. A common and quite useful rootstock is M111, which makes a semi-dwarf tree, 18’ to 20’ tall at maturity. Consult the sources below to learn more about rootstocks.

How to Collect Scion Wood

Scion wood is dormant one-year-old wood, gathered while the tree is asleep in winter. Collect scion “sticks” from last year’s vigorous growth, which will be on the end of outermost branches and in upright growth called “water sprouts”. Beginners can expect to graft one tree for every five inches of scion. Pack scion sticks in zip lock bags with a dry paper towel in each bag, to collect the moisture that the wood will emit. Label each bag with the apple variety and location of the tree. Store your future trees in a cool (34 to 38 F is ideal) place, not in the vicinity of apples (apples give off a gas that will kill the buds on your scions). Save your scions until you are ready to graft in March or April, depending on your planting zone. Then sign up for a grafting workshop to learn how to attach your scion to rootstock!

Root Stocks

Vintage Virginia Apples—source for rootstock and books. www.vintagevirginiaapples.com

See www.foggyridgecider.com for more resources, books and recipes.

“Once you see a scion bud start to grow, your orcharding life will never be limited again.”

Michael Phillips, The Apple Grower—A Guide for the Organic Orchardist
