

# Growing Apples in Montana



*Growing apples can be an enjoyable part of home gardening, but demands a year-round and year-to-year commitment by the gardener. In addition to the personal satisfaction of tree-ripened apples, apple trees have considerable landscape value. Properly cared for, they are attractive in form and display beautiful flowers in the spring.*

**Soil**—Apple trees perform best in a deep, fertile, well-drained, sandy loam soil. However, depending on the root-stock they are grafted on to, heavier soils are tolerated as long as the drainage is adequate. Apple trees will not tolerate “wet feet”, which makes them susceptible to root diseases. If your soil is heavy clay, it may be necessary to build up a small berm to plant the tree in.

**Planting**—Apple trees need to be planted in a full sun location for optimum fruiting. Bare root apple trees should be planted in the spring. This is when bare root trees are most commonly available in nurseries. Containerized trees can be planted any time during the growing season. Apple trees are propagated by grafting or budding a desired variety onto a rootstock. This rootstock determines the size of the tree and its hardiness. Never bury the graft union. Always plant the tree to the same depth as it was grown in the nursery.

**Fertilizing**—It is not advisable to add fertilizer when planting. Young roots are easily burned and the tree may die back. Use a complete fertilizer in the fall after the leaves have dropped or in the spring after the ground has thawed. Fertilizer stakes are easy to use and provide a slow release fertilizer throughout the growing season.

**Pollination**—Apples are generally not self-fertile. Two varieties, planted within 100 feet of each other, should be used to serve as a source of pollen for each other. Cross-pollination is possible only when varieties bloom at approximately the same time. The length of bloom is usually 7 to 10 days. Early bloomers should be planted with early or midseason bloomers and late bloomers with late or midseason bloomers. Crabapples can also be used to pollinate apple trees.

**Pruning**—There are three kinds of pruning: training, maintenance and corrective. **Training** is the process of giving desirable structure to fruit trees from 1 to 4 years after planting. This is done primarily to get the framework of branches located for convenience of harvesting and spraying. When a whip is planted, it should be cut back to approximately 30 inches. All side limbs should be cut back to five buds or removed

completely. On larger trees, 5 to 8 feet tall, all limbs lower than 2.5 to 3 feet should be removed entirely. No two limbs should arise at the same level on the trunk. Select limbs with a wide branching angle to the trunk or use spreaders to prevent narrow branch angles. Form additional scaffolds of 2 to 4 limbs at 18” to 24” intervals above the first. **Maintenance pruning** is used to renew fruiting wood, increase fruit size, improve fruit quality by letting more light into the tree, increase the fruit set and remove dead or damaged wood. **Corrective pruning**, which is often severe, is sometimes needed to reduce tree size and to correct or remove poor limbs. It is also used to rejuvenate trees that have been injured. Pruning can be done any time after the leaves fall in autumn and before bud break in the spring. Apple trees can also be pruned during the summer to remove water sprouts, suckers and broken or damaged stems.

**Insects and Diseases**—Success in growing apple trees depends on effective control of insects and diseases. Using dormant sprays in early spring before bud break is an effective way to control insects and disease. Codling moth caterpillars are the most serious problems. Trees should be sprayed with Malathion when leaves first start to appear. Repeat at 10 day intervals until bloom. Do not spray during blossom period. Repeat at 14 day intervals after bloom, up to 3 days before harvest.

**Sizes**—All apple trees that we carry are grafted on to a root stock. This root stock determines the hardiness, fruit bearing age and size of the tree.

**Standard** trees grow 20-25 feet tall by 25 feet wide. They will begin bearing fruit about 5-8 years after planting and are hardy to Zone 3.

**Semi-dwarf** trees grow 12-15’ tall by 14 feet wide. They will generally produce fruit 4-5 years after planting. They are hardy to Zone 3 or 4.

**Dwarf** trees grow 9-12 feet tall by 10 feet wide. They will produce fruit 3-4 years after planting. They are generally freestanding, but in the early years of bearing, some temporary staking may be required to avoid leaning. They are hardy to Zone 3 or 4.

Dwarf and semi-dwarf rootstocks will only reduce the size of the tree, not the fruit size. Smaller trees are easier to prune, spray and harvest.

## Apple Varieties

### Frostbite™ Apple—Zone 3

- Mid-late season bloomer.
- Small apple with a very sweet intense taste. Firm but crisp and juicy.
- Great for cider or cooking and eating.
- Extremely cold hardy.

### Goodland—Zone 4

- Early season bloomer that ripens in late August.
- Fruit is medium sized, washed red over creamy green, crisp, juicy, tender and aromatic.
- Especially good for baking with a short storage life.
- Very hardy and an annual bearer.

### Haralred—Zone 3

- Late season bloomer that ripens in early October.
- Fruit is red, juicy, tart and firm. Good keeper.
- Tree is very hardy and fireblight resistant.
- Good for fresh eating, baking and sauce.

### Honeycrisp—Zone 4

- Mid season bloomer that ripens in late September.
- Fruit is crisp, juicy and sweet but well balanced.
- Excellent storage life, up to 7 months.
- Good for fresh eating, baking and sauce.

### Red Baron—Zone 3

- Mid season bloomer that ripens in mid September.
- Fruit is medium sized, yellow with red and sweet.
- Good for fresh eating, pies and sauces, crisp & juicy.
- Fireblight resistant.

### Wealthy—Zone 3

- Early to mid season bloomer that ripens in mid Sept.
- Fruit is striped red with white firm flesh, keeps well and is tart.
- Good for cooking. Very hardy.

### SnowSweet—Zone 4

- Mid season bloomer that ripens mid to late September.
- Has a deliciously sweet, slightly tart taste.
- Above average resistance to Scab & Fireblight. Cold hardy.

### State Fair—Zone 3

- Early season bloomer that ripens mid to late September.
- Fruit is medium sized, red striped, with a sprightly tart flavor, good for eating and baking. Short storage life.

### Sweet Sixteen—Zone 3

- Mid season bloomer that ripens in mid-September.
- Fruit is medium sized, red striped, crisp and juicy with an excellent sweet, unusual flavor.
- Fireblight resistant.
- Good for fresh eating, baking and sauces. An outstanding dessert apple.

### Winecrisp - Zone 4

- Mid season bloomer ripens early to mid October.
- Medium sized dark red apple with juicy spicy flavor.
- Excellent resistance to scab.
- Fresh eating and cooking, good storage life

### Red Wealthy- Zone 3

- Mid-Late Season Bloomer; ripens late.
- Medium sized fruit, deep red over a pale yellow background
- Flesh is crisp, juicy, tart in flavor with a hint of strawberry.
- Good disease resistance to scab, cedar apple rust & firelight.
- Good for desserts or cider; good keeper.

## Crabapple Varieties

### Centennial—Zone 3

- Early season variety that blooms mid-May.
- Fruit is large, 1 3/4-2 inches long that ripens in mid to late August. Red over orange.
- Excellent flavor for fresh eating.
- Short storage life.
- Hardy.

### Chestnut—Zone 3

- Early to mid season variety that blooms mid-May.
- Pleasant nut-like flavor.
- Large fruit, 2 inches in diameter, ripens in early September.
- Outstanding flavor and good texture for eating.
- Hardy, vigorous, heavy bearing tree.
- Short storage life.

## RECIPES

Recipes courtesy of [www.epicurious.com](http://www.epicurious.com)

### Spiced Ginger-Apple Butter

4 lbs. McIntosh apples, peeled, cored, cut into 1" chunks  
1 1/2 c. apple cider  
1/2 c. (packed) golden brown sugar  
1 Tbsp. Minced crystallized ginger

Bring first 4 ingredients to boil in saucepan, stirring. Reduce heat to medium; simmer until apples fall apart, stirring occasionally, 10 minutes. Puree in processor in batches with ginger. Return to pan.

Partially cover apple butter; simmer over medium heat (sauce tends to splatter) until reduced to 2 1/2 cups, stirring occasionally, about 20 minutes. Cool completely. (Can be made 1 week ahead. Cover and refrigerate.) Makes 2 1/2 cups.

### Apple Syrup

Serve this warm over pancakes or waffles.

4 c. unsweetened apple juice  
1/2 c. sugar  
1 medium Granny Smith or tart apple—peeled, cored, diced  
2 Tbsp. raisins  
1 Tbsp. unsalted butter  
1/4 tsp. ground cinnamon

Combine apple juice and sugar in heavy large saucepan. Bring to boil over medium-high heat, stirring until sugar dissolves. Boil 10 minutes. Add apple and raisins and boil until mixture is reduced to 1 1/2 cups, about 15 minutes longer. Stir in butter and cinnamon. (Can be prepared 1 day ahead. Cover and refrigerate. Re-warm over low heat until heated through.) Serve warm. Makes 8 servings.



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