

APPLE *MALUS DOMESTICA*

From nutty to floral, sharp to sweet, and crunchy to soft, there's an apple for everyone. And with apple trees bred for the smallest spaces, you can have a mini-orchard on your doorstep or balcony. Visit an apple day or autumn garden show to taste different varieties before deciding what to buy.

CALENDAR

	SPRING	SUMMER	AUTUMN	WINTER
PLANT				
HARVEST				

Through the year
After the blossom fades, watch the apples swell on the branch through summer in anticipation of the autumn harvest.

PLANT

The right choice of rootstock (see pp.24–25) will ensure your apple trees don't get out of hand and will be productive in the space you can allow them. Freestanding trees on an M25 rootstock need spacing at least 6m (20ft) from other trees, but cordons grown on an M27 rootstock can be as little as 75cm (30in) apart. When training apples as cordons, stepovers, or espaliers (see pp.86–87), put the training wires and the posts in before planting.

Apples flower and fruit best in a sunny spot, but they'll also take

some dappled shade. Cooking apples will even grow well on a north-facing wall, allowing you to utilize the shadiest spots of your garden for a harvest of fruit.

Plant bare-root and potted apple trees in the dormant season, ideally in autumn while the soil is still warm, but any time between autumn and late winter. After planting, water the tree well then apply a mulch of compost or other well-rotted organic matter around the base of the trunk.

Planting a line of cordons at a 45° angle adds visual interest and makes them more productive.



GROW FROM Potted or bare-root trees
HEIGHT AND SPREAD Up to 4 × 8m (13 × 26ft)
HARDINESS Hardy
IDEAL SOIL Moist but well-drained
POSITION/SITE REQUIREMENTS ☀️ ☀️
TIME TO MATURITY Three years or more



Container-grown trees can yield a good harvest for the limited space they take up.

IN CONTAINERS The best apple trees for containers are those sold specifically for growing in pots, often as "patio" or "ballerina" trees, which are on dwarf rootstocks and should be pruned as cordons. Otherwise, any tree on an M27 or M26 rootstock will grow in a deep pot that's at least 50cm (20in) in diameter, and can be treated as a cordon or a goblet tree (see p.86 and p.84). Plant into a soil-based, peat-free compost and water well afterwards. Drive a long, thick bamboo cane or other long pole (such as a hazel bean pole) right to the base of the pot, close to the tree, and tie it in for support. For planting in raised beds, allow a depth of at least 45cm (18in) and proceed as for containers.



Gather and dispose of any fallen fruit with brown rot to reduce the chance of it infecting healthy apples.

GROW

Water young trees regularly; water mature trees in dry spells, especially during flowering and fruiting. Water trees in pots regularly (they may need it daily), ensuring the compost doesn't dry out as irregular watering can lead to wonky or split fruit. Give trees in containers a liquid feed every fortnight during spring and summer. Mulch trees

annually in late winter with compost or other well-rotted organic matter.

Apple trees will need first formative and then maintenance pruning every winter, while the trees are dormant (see p.82 and p.84). Trained forms will also need summer pruning (see pp.88–89). Apples can be affected by canker, apple scab, and brown rot (see p.40); aphids and codling moth can be a problem too (see pp.38–39).

HARVEST

A ripe apple detaches easily from the stalk when lifted slightly and given a quarter turn. Later-season apples can be picked a little early and ripened and stored indoors if frosts or storms that would blow them to the ground have been forecast.

Apples store well in a cold place, with slight humidity to prevent them from shrivelling. Lay undamaged fruits in trays in a single layer, not touching; later-season apples store better than early season varieties. Check them regularly and remove any rotten fruit. Alternatively, preserve them as juice or cook and then freeze them.

Yields are dependent on the size of the tree and variety as well as the growing conditions – for example, a late frost can kill the blossom, reducing the harvest. A single cordon could bear 2.25–4.5kg (5–10lb), an espalier 13.5–18kg (30–40lb), and a large mature freestanding tree between 27–55kg (60–121lb).



Moulded cardboard liners are ideal for preventing apples in storage from touching. Ask your grocer for spare ones.



A “stepover” or low-growing tree gives a productive edge to a border – as here, with the red-skinned variety ‘Falstaff’.

VARIETIES

There are thousands of apple varieties to choose from, so whittle them down to a shortlist based on taste and then check their pollination group (PG) – which indicates when they’ll flower – and if they’re available on the rootstock you need (see p.60 and p.24). “Russet” refers to the rough skins that are a trait of some apple varieties – don’t be put off by this, as they have some of the best flavours. In the lists below, “PG” denotes the pollination group number.

DESSERT/EATING APPLES

ASHMEAD’S KERNEL Mid- to late season. PG4. Heritage russet apple (see p.23) with a delectable flavour. Award of Garden Merit (AGM, see p.23).

BEAUTY OF BATH Early season. PG2. This heritage variety has fragrant, slightly tart, red-streaked flesh. Can’t be stored but makes good juice.

COX’S ORANGE PIPPIN Early to mid-season. PG3. Aromatic, crisp, and juicy heritage variety, a superb eating apple. Buy the self-pollinating version (‘Cox’s Self-fertile’) for better yields.

EGREMONT RUSSET Mid-season. PG2. The crisp, juicy flesh has a nutty flavour. A heritage variety suited to northern areas. AGM.

ELLISON’S ORANGE Early to mid-season. PG4. Fruits have an aniseed aroma and attractive red-flushed skin. Trees have some resistance to frost, scab, and canker. AGM.

FALSTAFF Mid- to late season. PG3. Juicy, flavourful apple that was the result of cross-breeding ‘Golden Delicious’ and ‘James Grieve’ in the 1970s.



‘Egremont Russet’ has the distinctive mottled, quite rough skin of russet apples.



‘Jonagold’ has attractive golden-green skin striped with orange and red.

GREENSLEEVES Early to mid-season. PG3. This variety gives reliable crops of pale-skinned, juicy fruit with a good acid/sweet balance. AGM.

JONAGOLD Mid-season. PG3. Reliable and vigorous variety that stores well; juicy flesh has a honeyed flavour. AGM.

KIDD’S ORANGE RED Early to mid-season. PG3. Rich, aromatic flavour similar to ‘Cox’s Orange Pippin’ (see left). AGM.

ORLEANS REINETTE Mid- to late season. PG4. This heritage variety bears large apples of excellent flavour and fine texture.

PITMASTON PINE APPLE Mid- to late season. PG3. Small yellow-skinned fruits have a nutty flavour and distinct honeyed pineapple scent.

SCRUMPTIOUS Mid-season. PG3. Thin, red skins and crisp, sweet flesh; these are reliable trees that crop and hold the fruit well. AGM.

COOKING APPLES

ANNIE ELIZABETH Mid- to late season. PG4. Good crops from disease-resistant trees. Light-flavoured heritage apple that keeps its shape when cooked.

BLenheim ORANGE Mid- to late season. PG3. Heritage variety; dual-purpose fruits can also be eaten raw and the rich flesh retains its shape when cooked. AGM.

BRAMLEY’S SEEDLING Mid- to late season. PG3. A vigorous heritage and commercial variety; bright green skin and acidic flesh that cooks to a puree. AGM.

EDWARD VII Late season. PG6. Reliable trees have some disease resistance. Acidic apples cook to a puree. AGM

FLOWER OF KENT (syn. ‘Isaac Newton’ or ‘Isaac Newton’s Tree’) Mid-season. PG3. Heritage variety, bred from the tree growing in the garden of the scientist Isaac Newton. Delicately flavoured flesh cooks to a puree.

GRENADIER Early season. PG3. Reliable trees; blossom has some resistance to frost. Fruits have green, slightly ribbed skin; tart flesh cooks to a puree. AGM.

HOWGATE WONDER Mid- to late season. PG4. Heritage variety; enormous fruits have orange/red skin and flesh that keeps its shape when cooked. AGM.

LANE’S PRINCE ALBERT Mid- to late season. PG3. Heritage variety with attractive, large fruits; good-flavoured flesh stays partially intact on cooking. AGM.

NORFOLK BEEFING Mid-season. PG3. Heritage variety. Firm flesh develops a rich, spiced flavour when slow-baked whole. Traditionally known as “biffins”.

REVEREND W. WILKS Early season. PG2. Large pale-skinned fruits break down to a relatively sweet puree on cooking. A compact heritage variety.

TOP TIP IF THE BRANCHES OF YOUR APPLE TREE ARE PARTICULARLY WEIGHED DOWN WITH FRUIT IN AUTUMN, SUPPORT THEM BY TYING THE CENTRE OF EACH BRANCH TO THE TRUNK OR A STAKE. REMOVE THE STRINGS AFTER HARVESTING.



‘Blenheim Orange’ is an eater and a cooker and thus saves space in the garden.



‘Bramley’s Seedling’ is a classic cooking apple that’s great for purees.



ALSO TRY

Crab apples (*Malus* species and cultivars) bear prolific harvests of cherry-sized apples in autumn and put on impressive displays of blossom in spring. The fruits are only eaten cooked, being especially used for a jelly to accompany savoury dishes, and are also a popular winter food for wildlife. Choose single-flowered varieties so that pollinators can also enjoy the blossom. Try *Malus* ‘Butterball’, which has bright yellow fruits; *M.* ‘John Downie’, which has an upright, conical habit and excellent autumn colour; or *M.* × *robusta* ‘Red Sentinel’, which forms a compact tree and holds its red apples until Christmas.

The vibrant bright red fruits of the crab apple tree are grown for cooking rather than eating raw.