



# APPLES

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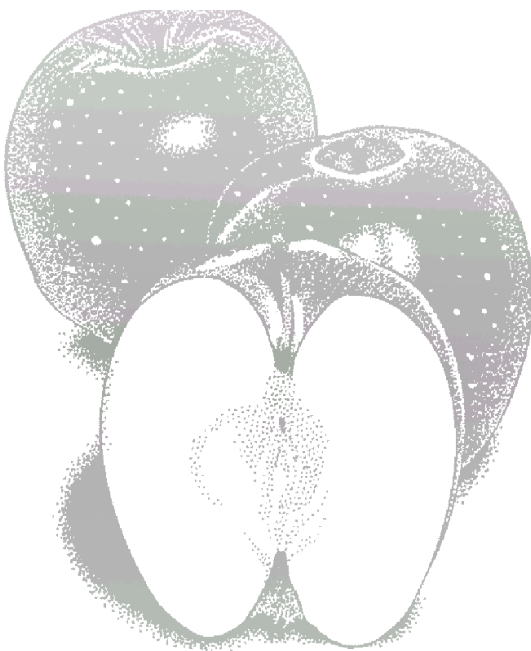
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## INTRODUCTION

Apples in Florida? No one quite believes it, but we can do it. Starting over 35 years ago, varieties suitable for our conditions were developed. Like peaches, nectarines and plums, apples need a certain amount of winter chill to produce fruit. Anna, the first truly low chill apple, was developed in Israel from crosses of American and local Arab varieties. Dorsett Golden is a 1953 chance seedling from the Bahamas Islands while Tropic Sweet is a recent University of Florida release. Irazu is another apple from the Israel breeding program, Reverend Morgan is used to pollinate it both do well in areas with 600 chill house. We have recently added two new local finds, Shell and Joy's, both of which are self fertile, so the list of apples grows for humid climates like ours.



## USES IN THE LANDSCAPE

It's the beauty of each changing season that gives you something to watch for with an apple tree. Spring brings billows of fragrant pink flowers followed by months of beautiful apples changing from green to yellow to red. In fall, leaves turn bright yellow. Standard-sized trees can be used as small shade trees or as part of a fruitful border. Mix apples with smaller fruits such as blackberries, figs and pomegranates to create a fruitful hedge along the boundaries of your property, to feed you and the wildlife.

# PLANTING AND CULTURE

## SITE SELECTION

Well-drained, sandy loam soils are preferred, but apples will grow on many soil types if good drainage is provided. Apples will grow more vigorously and produce more fruit in full sun. Avoid frost pockets - apples may be damaged by unseasonable frosts.

## SOIL PREPARATION AND PLANTING

Apples prefer slightly acid soil (pH 6.0 - 6.8). If you are in doubt about the acidity of your soil, it is very easy to take a sample to the Cooperative Extension agent in your county for a soil test.

Dig a planting hole approximately three times the width of the pot and at the same depth as the root ball. Set that soil aside and mix it 50/50 with either aged mushroom compost, aged manure, or rotted pine bark & aged manure/compost. Remove the plant from the pot, gently loosen the root ball and place in the planting hole. To avoid burying too deep, make sure plant is positioned with the top most roots at the soil line. Fill the planting hole with the mix of soil and organic matter; gently tamp it in. Water thoroughly to settle the roots and eliminate air pockets. **Do NOT put fertilizer in the planting hole.** Only apply fertilizer if it is the correct time of year (see Fertilization section below).

If desired, construct a water basin around the base of the tree approximately 36 inches in diameter. Keep an area approximately 4 feet in diameter around the apple clear of grass and weeds to minimize competition for water and nutrients. Mulch in spring and summer with approximately 4-6 inches of mulch. Pull mulch a couple of inches away from the trunk for good air circulation. In spring, we suggest a mix of compost and weed-free hay as mulch. In summer, use weed-free hay or grass clippings alone. Pine bark and pine needles are also good mulches.

Spacing for apples depends upon the desired use in the landscape. Trees should be at least 15-20 feet apart, but no further than 20 feet apart, to ensure cross pollination.

## FERTILIZATION

The type of fertilizer you choose may be chemical or organic. Make sure that the fertilizer contains iron, zinc, manganese, magnesium, molybdenum, copper and boron. These minor elements are very important to plants and most soils are low in these elements. Application rates vary according to age of plant. See chart below.

10-10-10 or 10-0-10 with minerals	1 cup for each year of tree's life - Max out at 9 cups for Mature tree
Espoma Citrus Tone (Organic)	6 cups for 1 year old 10 cups for 2 year old (4-6ft) 18 cups for 7-9ft tree 24 cups for tree over 9ft

Be sure to spread the fertilizer evenly under the entire canopy of the plant avoiding a 5-inch area around the trunk. Water or rake in. In zone 8 through 10 fertilize 3 times each

year in late February, late May and late July/early August. For plants further north (Zone 7), fertilize in March or after bud break. **Never fertilize after August** (June in Zone 7) as this will promote new growth late in the year which will be subject to freeze damage.

## **WATER**

The first year is a critical time for the establishment of a new apple. Water thoroughly twice a week on light soils and once a week on clay soils. Soak the entire root system deeply - this usually takes 40-50 minutes. Established apples should receive at least 1 inch of water each week. Water regularly, especially during dry periods. Fruit may drop prematurely if insufficiently irrigated during dry spells.

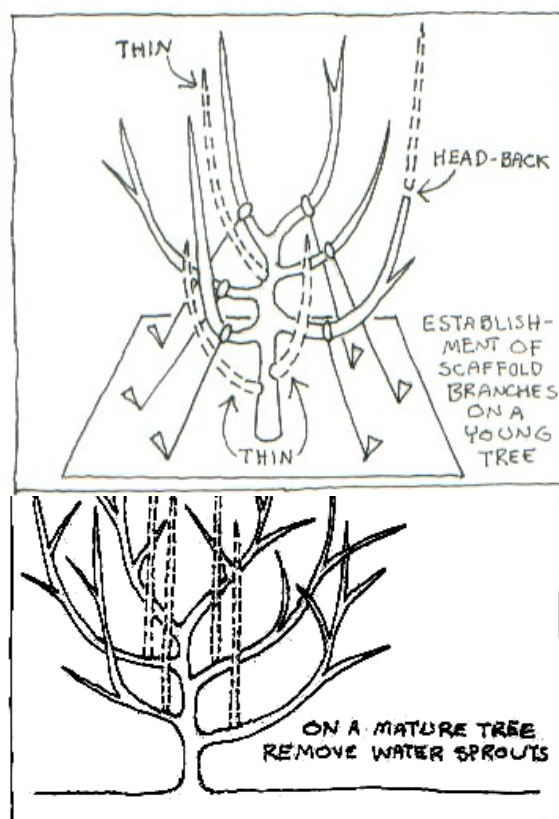
## **PRUNING**

Apples in the South are often pruned to an open center habit. At the time of planting, select 3-4 scaffold branches spaced equally around the trunk and remove other branches flush with the trunk.

In the second dormant season, top the scaffold limbs approximately 36 inches from the trunk to encourage secondary branching. You want the tree to have good air circulation in the interior.

Continue to train apple trees during the first 5 years. Pruning should be designed to train the tree upward and outward by thinning crossing branches. The trees can be held in their allotted space by mold and hold cuts, which are devigorating heading cuts made into two year old wood. Do this by topping back the main scaffold limb to a weaker outward growing shoot.

Mature trees are pruned during the dormant season. Thin out branches and head back long shoots as needed to maintain tree shape. Remove water sprouts. An unpruned tree will tend to be bushy, lack vigor and produce small, inferior quality apples. Remove any dead, damaged or diseased branches when pruning. Head trees back with mold and hold cuts to maintain height for ease of picking.



## **HARVEST**

Pick your apples when the background color lightens, changing from green to gold. Picking at various stages of ripening can yield you a nice range of flavors. Slightly ripe apples make wonderful pies and cider; fully ripe apples are much sweeter. Store apples in the refrigerator to extend their shelf life.

## VARIETY LIST

**ANNA** - Very large, beautiful red-blushed apples that are shaped like a Red Delicious but tastes like a Gala. We call this our "Firecracker" apple because it's always ripe by the Fourth of July. The flesh is so firm and juicy it actually crackles when you bite into it. Ripens late June-early July. Use Dorsett Golden or Tropic Sweet for cross pollination.

**DORSETT GOLDEN** - A beautiful, sweet, pale yellow apple slightly blushed with pink. Originally found growing in the Bahamas, this variety was brought to Florida and found to be an excellent pollinator for the Anna apple. Ripens mid June-mid July. Use Anna or Tropic Sweet for cross pollination.

**TROPIC SWEET** - New release from the University of Florida. Has some Anna in its breeding background. Super sweet, low acid fruit. Pale yellow with a rosy red blush. Ripens late June. Use Anna or Dorsett Golden for cross-pollination.

**IRAZU** - A rare, conical apple, green with a red blush. Use Reverend Morgan for cross-pollination.

**REVEREND MORGAN** - A self-fruitful Granny Smith seedling grown since the 1970s in Houston, developed by Rev. Henry Morgan. The fruit is very high quality, medium-large with a pinky-red blush over a green background and keeps well. An excellent dessert apple from a disease resistant tree. Ripens in early August, extending the apple harvest. Use Irazu for cross-pollination to increase yield.

**JOY'S** - Found between Havana and Tallahassee, the tree is healthy (without any maintenance!) and appears to be self-fertile since there are no other apples in the area. The fruit is crispy, sweet/tart, and green blushed with yellow. It ripens in late June into July. We don't know its story, but we do know it's delicious. Self-fertile.

**SHELL** - Originating in Alabama, this was developed by Mr. Green Shell (born 1841). Mr. Shell had an apple orchard in Escambia County, shipping boxcars of crisp, sweet/tart, green apples north in July. The Shell flavor is much like a Fuji. Shell has only recently been rediscovered and propagated (2007). Self-fertile.

## COOKING WITH SOUTHERN APPLES

All the apples that grow well in the humid South are good cooking apples, but their culinary characteristics differ. Anna, Joy's, Rev. Morgan and Shell are the crispest and tartest apple—use less sugar than you would for a pie made with Granny Smiths until you learn how to sweeten to your taste. Try a hint of lemon for contrast. Dorsett Golden and Tropic Sweet make superb applesauce, and need little added sugar. Experiment and enjoy!