

JUST FRUITS

AND EXOTICS

APPLES

INTRODUCTION

Citrus 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 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 + 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 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:

Starter Fertilizer & Soil (Apply at Planting)	Fertilizer to Maintain (Apply Early March, Late May, & Late July)
Espoma Bio-tone® Starter Plus Mix Mushroom Compost in Soil	Espoma Tree-tone®

Notes:

- Follow Instructions on Bag for how much to apply each time.
- Months to Fertilize vary based on your zone. Fertilize 3 times per year. We recommend the 1st fertilization starting after the last Freeze of the winter (Late February/Early March in zone 8) & the last Fertilization being no later than August or even June/July in some of the colder zones 7 & below.)
- Fertilizing too late in the year in colder climates will promote new growth, which will be subject to freeze damage.

See our “Planting a Tree Correctly” Guide & Espoma Bio-tone® and Tree-tone® Fact Sheets on our website for more info.

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.

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.

COOKING

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!

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.

VARIETIES

A detailed Variety List can be found on our website: justfruitsandexotics.com