

Feature GARDENING

Back to basics

By Grant Jenkins
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In this current financial climate many of us have made fresh inroads into growing more of our own fruit and vegetables in the garden plot or perhaps on a community allotment. A worthy tree to consider in your plans would be an apple, one of the oldest fruits known to man, one of the most cultivated and my personal favourite.

The right tree in the right place can thrive cropping up to 50lbs of fruit when mature and that's from a medium sized rootstock! When choosing an apple variety it is the root stock which mostly determines the size of the full grown tree. Root stocks vary and you should choose the one most suited to the space you have available. Consider the aspect of the land, sunny south facing slopes being the best, a well drained soil, along with shelter from wind burn and coastal salt laden wind are preferred.

It is important to choose trees that are in the same flowering group for cross pollination or you

can choose a variety which has the ability to pollinate itself. Pruning is best carried out between late autumn and early spring, how you prune your trees will depend on whether it bears fruit on the tips of the branches or on the side branches or spurs. Pruning when carried out correctly will encourage healthy growth, create a compact shape, remove unwanted branches, diseased and dead wood. It is essential for good flowering and in turn good fruiting.

Different varieties may do better in your area, some great Irish apple varieties have made a resurgence in recent years much to the credit of the Irish seed savers association (www.irishseedsavers.ie). Older varieties growing before the introduction of pesticides are much more resistant to scab and other diseases because they have acclimatised to Irish weather conditions. You might like to try some varieties traditionally grown in Cork, such as Aird Cairn Russet, Ballinora Pippin, Dick Davies, Rawleys Seedling or perhaps the Kerry Pippin might appeal.



Apple Blossom

A slightly more ambitious project would be to create a new orchard or perhaps you have the enviable possibility of restoring an old orchard. Orchards especially old ones are great habitat for native flora and fauna. Ripening apple trees growing in a wildflower meadow on a warm summers day will be at the centre of a myriad of insect, butterflies and bird life. An old orchard is a living link to our culinary past. Fruits eaten when ripe straight from the tree or stored to sustain the long winter months, cooked or baked, juiced or ferment-

ed into cider the combinations are endless.

The hardy character of the tree, the beautiful blossom or the wholesome fruit, the apple is one of the choicest gifts of nature. Some would grow apple trees for their spring blossom alone, but for me it's the harvest.

If you need any further information on apple trees or orchards or indeed any other tree matters please write to Grant at The Tree Company, Ballydehob, Co Cork or email info@thetreecompany.ie