



Clare Apple Tree Project 2021

An initiative of Clare County Council's *Keep Well In Your Community in Clare* project.

Pollination and Rootstocks

Apple trees need company for pollination, so it is recommended that two trees be planted in your garden, unless you have neighbours relatively nearby with apple trees already. Due to a very high demand for fruit trees this year in Ireland, there is a limit of two trees per household under this initiative, so get your orders in quickly.

Apple trees are generally grown on a variety of rootstocks, which influence the final size of the tree, the overall vigour, and the time to fruiting. Vigorous rootstocks will grow to 4.5m in height, but will only start to fruit after 4 or 5 years. Semi-dwarfing rootstocks will grow to 4m and come into fruit after 3 or 4 years. Dwarfing rootstocks reach 2.5 to 3m in height, and start fruiting after only 2 or 3 years. This project will mostly provide apple trees grown on the dwarfing rootstock, so they will be most suited to urban gardens with permanent staking and a clear, weed-free bed to grow in.

How to Plant Your Apple Tree

1. **Choose a sunny position**, sheltered from the wind and far enough (about 5m) from other trees to avoid undue competition.
2. **Soak the roots** (of bare rooted trees) in a bucket of water to rehydrate them before planting. An hour or two should do it. (not overnight).
3. **Remove the sod** and topsoil and set aside.
4. **Dig a square hole** about twice as large as the root ball and fork over the base removing any large stones. Roots will leave a square hole sooner than a round one, and grow more healthily as a result.
5. If your soil is poor, you may want to dig the hole a little deeper and **place some home-made compost or well rotted manure** in the base, and cover with a little soil. The compost shouldn't be in contact with the trees roots, but the tree will grow down and make use of the nutrients when it gets established.
6. **Replace the sod, grass side down and fork over it to loosen the soil**. This will give the tree a good start by providing nutrients and killing off the grass.
7. **Drive a stake** to the windward side before planting. (or at a 45 degree angle after planting). Dwarf rootstocks will need permanent staking, so use a good stout one; chestnut if possible because it lasts for many years without chemical treatment, but any stake will do.



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8. **Check the depth.** The original soil line of the planted tree should be at the same level as the soil in the new hole; when set at a slight mound above the surrounding ground level.
9. Once you have the right level, hold the tree in place and replace the soil around the tree roots and press in with your heel all around so that the earth is good and firm.
10. **Tie the tree to the stake** with a tree tie or some old strips of bicycle tyre. Use a figure of eight shape so that the trunk is not pushed against the stake.
11. **Water well** with a full bucket of water. (also water weekly in the first summer if the weather is dry. Use a full bucket each time.)
12. **Mulch around the base** of the tree, for 1m all around, with cardboard or old natural wool carpet or plastic sheet mulch. Weigh down with woodchips or grass clippings. All apple trees will benefit from being kept completely free of grass for the first few years, and dwarf varieties will want grass-free conditions for all of their life.

Get Growing

If you don't have space for a small apple tree, there are still benefits to be found in gardening. Even a pot of herbs on a window-cill can help us to connect with the soil and with something growing and green. Whatever scale you decide to work on, make this week the week you get into the garden and start growing. The Clare GIY (Grow It Yourself) Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/547867419173887>) can help with tips and advice to get the novice gardener started and for experienced gardeners to share their knowledge and wisdom.

More hints, tips and ideas:

For two different planting methods check out these videos:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JIAZ4Spmb64&feature=emb_rel_end

<https://www.permaculture.co.uk/videos/how-plant-fruit-tree-really-well>

If you want to introduce companion plants around the tree have a look at Apple Tree Guilds:

<https://regenerative.com/seven-parts-apple-tree-guild/>

For tips on home composting (so you can mulch your tree each year and help it to thrive)

see the IPCC guidelines here: <http://www.ipcc.ie/advice/composting-diy/>

For information on growing and cooking your own food, check out the GIY (Grow It Yourself)

website: <https://giy.ie/>

Your new apple trees will provide food for bees and other pollinating insects. The All Ireland Pollinator Plan website shows many other things you can do help support wildlife in your

garden: <https://pollinators.ie/gardens/>

If you'd like to bring your new planting skills out into the wider world, consider setting up a local community orchard. Visit <https://www.wetlandsystems.ie/gardenofedenproject.html> for details.

The project privacy policy can be viewed here:

[http://www.clarecoco.ie/\[info\]/privacy-statement/default.html](http://www.clarecoco.ie/[info]/privacy-statement/default.html)



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