

County: Harlan

Contact: Jeremy Williams

Phone: 606-573-4464

Selecting a scab-immune apple tree for your backyard

An apple tree usually is one of the first fruit crops backyard fruit growers think about planting in their yard. However, they are one of the more difficult fruit crops to grow, primarily because of the wide range of pests that like them. One of the more difficult diseases for home fruit growers to combat is apple scab. This is a fungus that causes lesions on the fruit and can also defoliate the tree and kill the spurs – the structures that produce the flower buds.

Several other diseases Kentucky fruit growers must contend with are fire blight, cedar apple rust and powdery mildew.

Over the past 25 years, a number of scab-immune apple varieties have been released. The following apple varieties have performed well in Kentucky and are discussed in order of ripening. Most also have resistance to several other diseases.

Redfree – a red apple that ripens in August and colors well for this time of the season. Redfree is a tart, sweet apple which will keep for several months and also has resistance to cedar apple rust, as well as sooty blotch and fly speck diseases.

Liberty – a very tart, McIntosh-type apple that ripens in late August. In a cool fall, Liberty develops dark red stripes over a green/yellow fruit.

Enterprise – a red, spicy, crisp and fine-grained apple that ripens in mid-to-late October. Enterprise has a relatively thick skin, a very good disease resistance package and stores well until February.

Gold Rush – a very firm, tart, yellow apple that ripens in mid-to-late October. It sweetens up in storage and is one of the best storing apples available, keeping up to eight months. It has a very good resistance to scab and fire blight, but is susceptible to cedar apple rust.

Sundance – a firm, yellow apple, which is more difficult to find. It is very resistant to all four of the early season problem diseases and ripens in mid-October.

Since these apples are disease resistant, many novice growers mistakenly believe they don't need to spray them. Unfortunately, these varieties don't have any insect resistance. Attempting to grow apples without spraying for plum curculio, coddling moth, rosy apple aphid and scale can cause major crop losses, if not complete crop loss, depending on the season.

The most important sprays for apple varieties are the early ones, the dormant oil, pin, petal fall and first-cover sprays.

The publication, Disease and Insect Control Programs for Homegrown Fruit in Kentucky with Organic Alternatives (ID-21), provides descriptions of these varieties and spray recommendations. You can contact our office to request one of these publications.

The Harlan County Cooperative Extension Service will be providing a Fruit Tree Management Workshop on Monday, February 28, 2011. The workshop will be divided into two sections: Managing Fruit Trees and Pruning and Grafting Fruit Trees. The Managing Fruit Trees session will be held at the Harlan County Detention Center orchard and will begin at 3:30pm. The Pruning and Grafting session will be held at the Harlan County Extension Depot and will begin at 5:30pm. If you have any questions or would like to register for either of these workshops, contact us at the Harlan County Cooperative Extension Service at 573-4464.

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