



You know the saying, “An apple a day keeps the doctor away.” How great would it be if that apple came off a tree in your own backyard? This year find out how to ‘pick’ the perfect apple to add to your landscape whether its one tree or an entire apple orchard.

One of the most important steps in a home fruit orchard happens before the ground is even touched. Planning is the most important task because fruit trees are long-term investments. Two main factors that need to be taken into consideration include the growing environment and tree selection.

The growing environment is one critical factor to look at in the planning process. The soil determines how successful your future fruit tree will produce. In order to know what your soil is like, perform a soil test. The soil test will tell you the pH, fertility levels, and the amount of organic matter present in the soil. It is important to do your soil test early in your planning process so you can make any amendments that may be needed. The soil type also plays a role in the success of fruit trees. Heavy clay soils can hold water too well, which can lead to reduced growth and even death. Extremely sandy soils are at the opposite extreme and might not be able to hold enough water to sustain a tree. Light is another key component of the growing environment to consider. Most fruit crops will need to receive at least 6 to 8 hours of direct, mid-day sun for best production. If there is much less than 6 hours the growth and production of the tree will be compromised.

After the perfect location is selected, cultivar selection is another important tasks. Apple cultivars should be selected based upon their vigor, productivity, climate adaptability, fruit quality, disease resistance, personal preferences, and what you plan to do with the fruit. Mature tree size is an important factor when selecting an apple tree. Mature fruit trees are classified as standard, semi-dwarf, dwarf, or even ultra-dwarf. The tree size can be determined either by genetics or by grafting two trees together. A standard tree will have no size modifications and may be too large for some sites. Semi-dwarf trees will grow about 8-15 feet tall. Dwarf trees can range in height from 5-8 feet while ultra-dwarfs will grow no larger than 3-4 feet. Both semi-dwarf and dwarf types of trees might need to be supported due to the potentially heavy fruit load. For a list of fruit tree cultivars for Nebraska, visit

<http://extensionpubs.unl.edu/> and search ‘fruit tree’ or follow this link

<http://extensionpublications.unl.edu/assets/pdf/g1005.pdf>

Nothing beats biting into a crisp apple. In Nebraska, apples are commonly infected by cedar apple rust and apple scab. There are several options to preventing cedar apple rust in apples. One option is to remove all cedar trees within a 2 mile radius of the tree (not really feasible). Fungicide applications can also be applied to the cedars, apples, or both routinely when the fungal fruiting bodies are present in the spring. The last option, and the easiest when planting new trees, is to select a cultivar of apple that is resistant to those diseases. Some cultivars that are both apple scab and cedar apple rust resistant include Freedom, Liberty, and Enterprise. Keep in mind that some apple trees are not self-fruitful, meaning that they will need another cultivar of apple to act as a pollinator in order to get a good fruit crop.

There are many factors to consider before you can begin to pick your own apple right off the tree. The growing environment needs to be suitable and plant selection is an important aspect on your quest for the perfect fruit tree. Once these factors are addressed, you are on your way to eating an apple a day for years to come.

*Elizabeth Exstrom is the Horticulture Extension Educator with Nebraska Extension in Hall County. For more information contact Elizabeth at [elizabeth.exstrom@unl.edu](mailto:elizabeth.exstrom@unl.edu), her blog at <http://huskerhort.com/>, or HuskerHort on Facebook and Twitter.*