

Ag Column

February 22, 2016

Learn to Graft a Fruit Tree

According to some historians, grafting initially began around 400 BC. According to an article, titled "A History of Grafting, grafting was a pivotal technology in horticulture. There was much skepticism due to the lack of understanding of this new technology. This new technology was responsible for the clonal propagation of woody species, like tree fruit, since they didn't propagate easily by cuttings. Apples will grow from seed, but they will not reproduce the same fruit.

The UT-TSU Extension Sullivan County Office will conduct grafting workshops on Tuesday, March 22. Call our office at 423-279-2723 register and reserve your rootstock.

Fruit trees are grafted for a number of reasons. Probably, one of the most important reasons is grafting is a reliable method of vegetative propagation. Vegetative propagation means that you take a cutting, referred to as a scion, from a plant to make a new identical plant. Yes, grafting is essentially cloning. Another important benefit of grafting is the ability to control the size of the mature tree. By grafting, you can reduce the size of a tree by as much as 75%. One disadvantage of a dwarf tree is their poor root system. Due to lack of a good root system, a dwarf tree will need support for the life of the tree to prevent the tree from falling over.

By selecting different rootstocks, we can give the tree resistance to diseases such as collar rot and fire blight and insects such as woolly apple aphid.

Other reasons to graft are repair of a damaged tree, to change the cultivar or have multiple cultivars on the same tree.

We will have two grafting workshops on Tuesday, March 25 in Blountville. We will teach you the process of grafting and provide one-on-one instruction while you practice grafting your own trees.

We will have a selection of scion wood for you to choose from. If you want a specific tree, you probably should collect scion wood from the tree. Water sprouts from the tree make the best scions and should be cut from the tree before the buds begin to swell.

We will have grafting knives and pliers for you to use as well as grafting tape, tree tags, and rootstock. You will need to call our office to register and select the rootstock you would like to reserve.

If you are interested in learning to graft fruit trees, call the UT-TSU Extension Sullivan County Office at 423-279-2723 for more information.