

Ag Column
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Register for Upcoming Fruit Tree Grafting Workshop

Come to our grafting workshop and learn a new skill. The workshop is scheduled for Thursday, March 17 at the Ron Ramsey Ag Center in Blountville. Call 423-574-1919 for more information.

We've all wanted to plant an apple or other fruit seed like Johnny Appleseed. Today, we have many varieties of fruit each with their own size, color, flavor, texture, disease and insect resistance. All fruit trees must be grafted to reliably reproduce a tree that will yield the same fruit. If you plant an apple seed, you will get an apple tree, but you probably won't be happy with the results. The fruit will likely have the characteristics from one of two parents.

A grafted tree is a clone produced by joining a rootstock and a cutting from an existing tree. Fruit trees are grafted for a number of reasons. Probably, one of the most important reasons we graft trees is to mass produce desirable varieties. 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.

Nurseries grow the rootstock or the bottom part of the graft. You must cut the scion or the top part of the graft from existing trees as dormant cuttings. You will be more likely to have a successful graft if you cut the scions before the buds begin to swell. The best scion should be cut from last year's growth and not have any branching. These are often called water sprouts.

We will have grafting knives and tools 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 Extension Sullivan County Office at 423-423-574-1919 for more information.