

CHOOSING THE RIGHT ROOTSTOCK

Almost all fruit trees are grafted onto a rootstock.

This means that the tree is made up of two different plants brought together by grafting. The roots and the lower portion of the trunk are called the rootstock and it determines the characteristics of the tree.

Choosing the right rootstock

A single large apple tree can produce over 100kg of fruit per year. If you can't eat, store, utilise that amount of fruit then it might be better to have two or three smaller trees of different varieties.

The most vigorous pear trees can have a spread of 20m and apples 10m. Bear in mind that two trees may need to be planted of each tree for pollination.

Vigorous trees are tall and all picking, pruning etc. needs to be done from a ladder. A dwarf is reachable from the ground or a little step up.

If you need to start harvesting some fruit within a couple of years of planting, then a dwarf variety would be better as trees that ultimately reach a good size can take several years to fruit.

If you want to grow your tree or trees in a pruned form, e.g. as an espalier or a fan, you should choose a vigorous stock as the intensive pruning these trees will need naturally reduces their vigour. The same goes if fruit trees are going to be grown in containers as the pot will reduce the size of the root system and reduce natural vigour.

If your soil is poor or your climate challenging, choose a more vigorous rootstock than you would if conditions were kinder.

Apples

M26 – Trees on this rootstock reach about 8-10ft high, crops in the second or third year depending on variety. Also, unlike other dwarfing stocks, M26 needs no staking unless in a very exposed situation.

MM106 (semi-dwarfing) – Was the most widely planted rootstock for bush apples in commercial orchards. Attains a height of 12-15 ft if allowed. Quite early fruiting. Suitable for fan trees and cordons. Plant 12-15 ft (3m) apart, fans and cordons 3ft.

M25 and MM111 (half-standards) – will grow to 15-18ft.

Pears

Quince A will grow to around 13-16ft depending on the strength of the variety.

Quince C is smaller but choose this only if you can provide the best soil conditions and good care.

Kirchensaller produces a tree to the same height as a seedling. Such rootstocks are used to create specimen trees, or can be used to add vigour to naturally small varieties

Plums

Pixy – Will grow 8-10ft and gives some resistance to silverleaf.

St Julien A – Will grow 12-15ft.

Cherries

Gisela – Will grow to around 6-8ft.

Colt – Will grow 15-18ft