

Build an Orchard in Your Backyard

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Have you ever noticed in some seed catalogs offer apple, pear, and cherry trees that they claim have several varieties on the same tree? Looks like a good deal for a home owner, but is it? These advertisements are for trees that have several cultivars grafted onto one tree. Looking at one seed company website I saw that a five in one apple is available for 30 to 50 dollars, depending on which root stock is used. They use a grafting technique called budding to achieve such a feat. This sounds like a difficult procedure but it really is fairly simple.

Nurserymen and homeowners have been grafting trees for centuries. Many of the trees we purchase commercially are grafted for various reasons. I know of a certain church parish in Fargo, North Dakota that has several apple trees with up to 10 different varieties on a single tree. All you need is an established apple or crabapple to be able to “make your own” tree with the fruit you will enjoy for years to come.

If you have an established apple or crabapple you can start grafting this winter. Grafting requires a root stock and a scion. The root stock is the portion that is in the ground; it provides the roots for the future tree. The scion is the desired above ground portion of the tree. Ask your neighbors if they have an apple tree they like that you can cut a few twigs off of to use as scion. Beware that some cultivars may be protected by patent laws; so use your best judgment when selecting varieties to use for scion.

You will need a sharp knife and some rubber bands or the old style “rubber” electrical tape, or a pruning sealant. Make your cuts as illustrated in the following diagrams on cleft grafting and remember that the cambium layers of the two pieces must line up for healing to take place. The cambium is the layer of cells just below the bark.

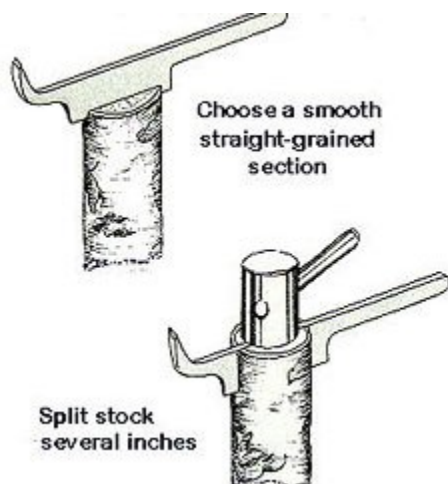


Figure 1. Preparing the stock

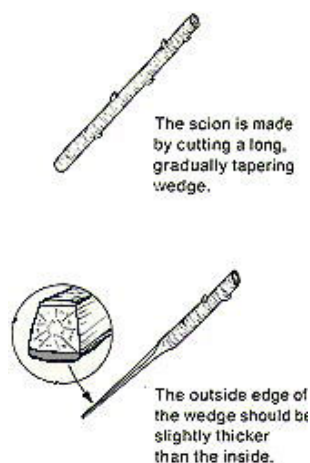


Figure 2. Preparing the scion

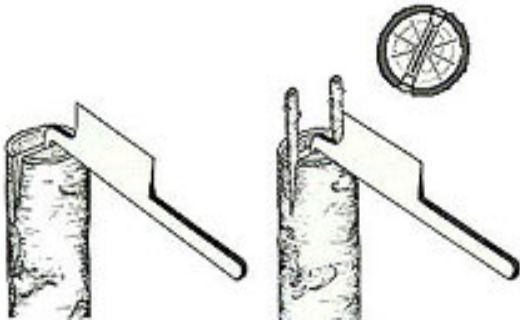


Figure 3. Inserting the scion into the stock



Figure 4. Sealing the graft

A picture is worth a thousand words but if you need more textual information take a look at <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/stonefruit/tpwk.html> for more detailed information on top working. Using this procedure you can build your own “five in one” apple tree and you will likely have fruit much sooner than ordering a new tree and planting it. Grafting does take some practice and patience but one can have success right from the beginning. I would suggest doing several grafts of the same variety to ensure success. Your tree will look goofy for a while but should result in an orchard on a single tree.

Source: David Byrne, Texas A & M University

More information on horticultural topics can be found by visiting us online 24 hours a day at <http://www.co.pennington.sd.us/extension/extsvc.html> or by calling me at 605-394-2188 or by email at ricky.abrahamson@sdstate.edu. When visiting the website be sure to give us some feedback by clicking on the “feedback” icon.