

CLONING APPLE TREES

We occasionally receive calls from gardeners who want to know how to treat an apple seed so it will germinate. Usually, the gardener is trying to reproduce an old apple tree that was special for some reason (good quality fruit, planted by grandparents, etc.). Unfortunately, apples grown from seed will not be like the parent. About 1 in every 80,000 apple trees grown from seed will be as good as the apples we are used to eating. Apple trees grown from seed usually have small and inferior quality fruit. If you want a tree exactly like the parent, you must propagate that tree vegetatively. In the case of apples, this usually means grafting. Apple trees are actually quite easy to graft, even for novices. Don't be afraid to try even if you haven't grafted before. The step that needs to be done at this time of year is the choosing and cutting of scion wood or small branches that will be grafted on top of a rootstock. However, if you don't have an existing tree to graft onto, you will need to plant a rootstock this year for grafting onto next. Fruit trees are normally grafted (or budded) onto specially selected rootstocks. These rootstocks usually reduce tree size. For example, a tree that normally would reach 25 feet tall will only reach 10 feet if it is grown on a certain rootstock. Dwarfing rootstocks also allow apples to bear fruit a year or more earlier. A tree on its own roots normally takes 5 to 7 years before it will bear. Semi-dwarf trees bear in 4 to 5 years, and dwarf trees bear in 3 to 4 years. Unfortunately, not all dwarfing rootstocks are well adapted to Kansas. Semi-dwarf trees usually are a better choice for us. Note that rootstock reduces tree size, not fruit size. Therefore, a Golden Delicious tree that only reaches 8 feet tall due to a dwarfing rootstock, will bear the same size fruit as a Golden Delicious tree that is 25 feet tall. Most nurseries only sell trees that are already grafted. A company that does sell rootstocks is Raintree Nursery, Morton, WA, (360) 496-6400, another is Cummins Nursery, (865) 233-3539. It is also possible to buy a tree from a local nursery and graft your clone into it. This will give you one tree that produces two different apples. One disadvantage of this method is that it is possible to prune off the special clone by mistake in later years. This information does not include the details of grafting or budding or subsequent care. Both Oklahoma State University and the University of Missouri have excellent publications on grafting. If you have difficulty finding them give me a call at the Butler County Extension office at (316)321-9660 and I will be happy to assist you.

Use a Planting Calendar

If you start vegetable plants indoors, it is often helpful to list seeding dates on a calendar so that plants are ready for transplanting at the proper time. To do this, choose your transplant date and count back the number of weeks necessary to grow your own transplants. For example, cabbage, broccoli, and cauliflower are usually transplanted in late March to early April. It takes 8 weeks from seeding to transplant size. Plants should be seeded in early February. Below are examples of some common vegetables grown for transplants and a recommended date for seeding. Dates are Saturdays as this is when many homeowners have the most free time. The dates are not set in stone, and a week earlier or later will not ruin the plants. Also, you may want to seed a week or two earlier if you are in southern Kansas and possibly a week later if you are in northern Kansas. Keep notes on how well the transplants did so you can tweak the planting schedule. Your conditions may result in plants that need a bit more or a bit less time.

<u>Crop</u>	<u>Seeding Date</u>	<u>Transplant Date</u>
Cabbage, Broccoli & Cauliflower	February 6	April 2
Lettuce (if you grow transplants)	February 6	April 2
Peppers	March 19	May 14
Tomatoes	March 26	May 7

Miniature Roses

Miniature roses are dwarf versions of roses including the classic hybrid teas. Though they are much smaller (12 to 15 inches tall or less), they are surprisingly tough and can be planted outside where they will survive our Kansas winters if mulched. However, many gardeners like to grow the miniatures indoors where they can enjoy them during the drab winter months.

Miniature roses grown as houseplants have specific requirements. For long lasting flowers, air should be moist with a relative humidity of 50 to 60 percent preferred though 40 percent is adequate. Placing the pots on a tray that holds moist pebbles will help provide the humidity needed. Like most plants, roses need a lot of light in order to flower. Though miniature roses will survive in a south window, many people will supplement available light with fluorescent lamps. Timers can be used to automatically turn the lights on and off. Providing 14 hours of light per day will be plenty for roses to grow and flower. Lights are normally spaced 3 to 4 inches above the tops of the plants. Probably the most serious pest of these plants indoors is spider mites. These mites are very small but can devastate miniature roses. They like dry, warm conditions. Maintaining adequate relative humidity levels and washing the plants once a week in tepid water will help prevent problems. If mites do develop, try using an insecticidal soap or horticultural oil (2 percent rate) for control. The horticultural oil will probably be more effective than the soap. Be sure to spray or wash the entire plant including the underside of the leaves so that all mites are contacted. Miniature roses can be placed outdoors during the summer to take advantage of higher light levels. Do not place the plant in full sun immediately but gradually grant more light over a period of several weeks. Pots sunk in the ground will not need to be watered as often as those exposed. Turn the pot 180 degrees every couple of weeks to break off any roots that escape the pot and move into the underlying soil. Miniature roses are not the easiest plants to grow as houseplants but can be well worth the effort required.