

Your New apple tree was grafted using certified M. 111 EMLA 80% dwarf root stock from Oregon in February at Clear Creek Farm in Santa Rosa County, FL.

APPLE: Malus X domestica "Shell"
FAMILY: Rosaceae
GENUS: Malus
CULTIVAR: Shell

Farmer Green Shell developed a low chill hour apple tree hybrid in the late 1800's in Escambia County Alabama in the community near Brewton now known as Appleton. The thriving farm made sweet cider, apple jelly and shipped wagon loads of fresh apples to northern markets. The apples became known as Shell Apples. They are crisp, slightly tart green apples which typically come off around the 4th of July. Young trees were sold from the farm. Many homes in the vicinity of Appleton had Shell Apple trees for family use.

Just before the turn of the present century, Dan Mullins, a horticulture agent in Santa Rosa County, Florida, took interest in preserving the heirloom fruit tree. He found a surviving Shell tree near Jay, harvested scion wood, grafted trees and planted a test orchard. As interest in apple trees for the Florida climate grew, Dan taught grafting and promoted the resurrection of the Shell as a suitable fruit tree for our area. Dan taught Ray and Wanda Davis of Clear Creek Farm grafting. They planted an orchard, and now sell trees and teach grafting. Clear Creek Farm is now shipping scion wood to Uganda.

In addition to Dan Mullins interest and hard work with the Shell Apple, Wayne Sherman of the University of Florida, discovered the Anna in Israel. Horticulturist's there crossed an American tree with an Arab variety to create the Anna. This apple is similar in shape to the Red Delicious and ripens in July. It needs 250 Chill hours. Dr Sherman's breeding program then produced "Tropic Sweet." This low acid sweet fruit has a pale yellow color with a rosy red blush and is ripe in late June. The Dorsett Golden variety, a pale yellow with a pink blush chance seedling from the Bahamas Islands is a third tree that only needs 100-200 chill hours. Apples need cross pollination and reasonable care and attention to set a consistent crop. You need to plant another low chill variety near your Shell tree for best results.

Do not move the tree by the trunk, rather, pick it up by the pot using care to protect the graft. If your tree has already grown branches and leaves, transport it home in an enclosed vehicle or cover it carefully during the move. Be careful to protect the graft and keep the tree potted in a sunny spot and well watered for 4 to 5 months for roots to become established and the plant to thrive. Carefully pinch off any branches or buds and flowers growing below the graft. In about 5 months use a box cutter knife or razor blade to carefully cut away and discard the grafting tape from around the graft union. The graft wound should have healed over by then and the scion portion of the graft should be producing branches or blossoms which are the signs of a successful graft.

Apples like a well drained sandy loamy soil with a pH of somewhere between 6.0 and 6.8 and do best in full sun. A balanced 10-10-10 slow release fertilizer with micro-nutrients. You want a mix containing iron, zinc, manganese, molybdenum, copper, and boron. Read and follow the instructions but usually about a pound of fertilizer per year for each year of the tree's age to a maximum of 15 pounds is right.

This is the equivalent of about a cup per application in the first year administered in February, April and July avoiding the two inch area around the trunk. Spread evenly over the root zone and water it in well.

When you are ready to plant, select a sunny spot with well drained slightly acid (pH 6-6.8) sandy loamy soil. Your planting hole should be two to three times the width of the pot and about as deep as the container it is in. Fill the hole with compost, aged pine bark mulch or manure mixed with soil from the hole at a 50:50 ratio. Mushroom compost mixed with rotted leaves and pine bark is also a good combination. If you plan an orchard, space your trees about 15 to 20 but no more than 25 feet apart to ensure cross pollination. Plant them away from other trees or large shrubs. Remember not to plant too close to a structure and remember to look up for obstructions that might interfere with future growth. Remove the tree from the pot by placing one hand palm down on top of the root ball with the trunk between your fingers. Supporting the top of the root ball in the pot in this manner, turn the pot upside down and pull the pot off the root ball with your other hand. Make every effort to keep the root ball soil together for planting. Check for roots circling the root ball and loosen or score them gently before planting. Plant the tree at a depth which leaves the uppermost roots of the tree exposed slightly above ground level. Position the tree straight in the hole and stake it. Now add your soil and mulch mix to the hole around the root ball and water it in to remove any air pockets rather than packing the soil tight with your hand or foot. Cover the hole with mulch and build a berm about three foot in diameter around the trunk to retain water and add a wire cylinder around the trunk of tree if you feel it needs protection from rabbits, deer, dogs, small children, string trimmers or mowers. Do not fertilize immediately after planting (follow recommendations mentioned earlier) but do follow a regular watering regimen. Water daily for the first 2 weeks, then every other day for the next two months, then weekly until you feel the tree is well established. At least 1" of water a week works best for the first year. Consider compost and weed free hay as mulch in spring and weed free hay or grass clippings in summer. Leave a couple of inches around the trunk clear of mulch. Keep the 3 to 4 feet around the base of the tree free of weeds and grass to eliminate competition for water and soil nutrients. Use a 4 to 6 inch depth of mulch to help retain moisture and keep weeds and grass from growing around the tree. As the tree takes hold and begins to grow, learn and practice proper pruning technique. A newly planted tree may be cut off around 30" above the ground to encourage scaffold limbs to emerge in the first growing season. When the tree goes dormant and loses its leaves, select 3 or 4 scaffold branches spaced equally around the trunk to retain and remove any others flush to the trunk with a set of sharp pruning shears. In the second dormant season, prune the tops of the scaffold limbs about 3' from where they join the trunk to encourage secondary branching and to achieve better air circulation. Train the tree for the first 5 years to grow up and out. Thin crossed branches and remove dead or diseased branches when pruning. The dwarf varietal stock your tree was grafted to should grow to 15 to 20 feet over time and produce tasty fruit for years to come (Which Deer & Squirrels love, so act accordingly). Good luck and thanks for buying a Clear Creek Farm Apple Tree! Contact for Clear Creek Farm on the internet is raywanda@aol.com telephone is (850) 449-1176.