



# Top Tips

## Growing Apple and Pear Trees

### Part 1

You can fit an Apple or Pear tree into any size of garden (there are even several varieties that are bred to grow happily in a large pot – see below for suppliers) and you can choose to prune your trees into a cordon, step-over or espalier shape so they need less room. The advantage of including them in your garden are the beautiful early spring blossom, which is much appreciated by bees, as well as the tasty and colourful fruit.



*Apple 'cordon' blossom in April*



*Apple 'step-over's covered with fruit in September*

## Choosing Tree Cultivars

We have been breeding apple and pear trees for many centuries and now have thousands of different cultivars to choose from, which can be daunting for new growers. When choosing your tree you should consider the following key points;

**What type of soil do you have?** – acid/alkaline, wet/well-drained etc.

**What temperatures do you get in your garden?** – generally urban gardens are warmer than rural gardens, but any garden may have ‘frost-pockets’ if they are in valleys.

We don't generally think of apples and pears as exotic fruits, but their trees do like warm, sunny conditions and reasonably well-drained soil. In the UK most of our commercial orchards are based in the southern counties, with a few in Cheshire and Yorkshire. So if you're growing fruit in Lancashire or Manchester you'll need to choose hardy cultivars that can cope with colder conditions and late frosts (which can often damage blossom and stop trees producing fruit). Recommendations for colder counties are below

### Apples:

Cultivar	Type	Pollination Groups	
		Group	Pollinated by
Court Pendu Plat	Eating	6	(5, 6, 7)
Keswick Codling	Eating	2	(1, 2, 3)
Discovery	Eating	3	(2, 3, 4)
Egremont Russet	Eating	2	(1, 2, 3)
Ellison's Orange	Eating	4	(3, 4, 5) + self-fertile
Fiesta	Eating	3	(2, 3, 4)
Greensleeves	Eating	3	(2, 3, 4)
James Grieve	Cook/Eat	3	(2, 3, 4) + self-fertile
Laxton's Superb	Eating	4	(3, 4, 5) + self-fertile
Lord Derby	Cooking	4	(3, 4, 5) + self-fertile
Lord Lambourne	Eating	2	(1, 2, 3)
Newton Wonder	Cooking	5	(4, 5, 6)
Spartan	Eating	3	(2, 3, 4)
Sunset	Eating	3	(2, 3, 4)
Worcester	Eating	3	(2, 3, 4)
Pearmain			

### Pears:

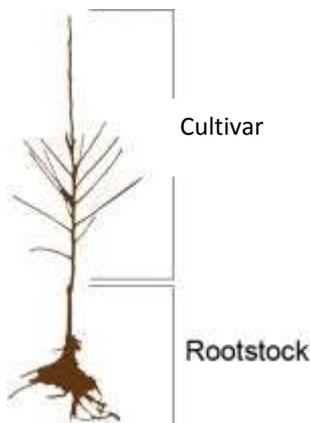
Invincible	Eating	C	(B, C, D)
Concorde	Eating	C	(B, C, D) + self-fertile
Beurre Hardy	Eating	B	(A, B, C)
Conference	Eating	A	(A,B) + self-fertile

## Explaining pollination groups

Because we've created so many cultivars from wild apple and pear trees they now flower at different times and need to be cross-pollinated by different cultivars to produce fruit. In other words, most are not self-fertile but need to be planted near to other cultivars so bees can transfer the pollen from one tree to another to fertilise and generate fruit. The list above shows which group each cultivar is in and which other tree groups it can pollinate.

If you have a small space and can't have more than one tree choose a self-fertile cultivar to ensure that you get fruit.

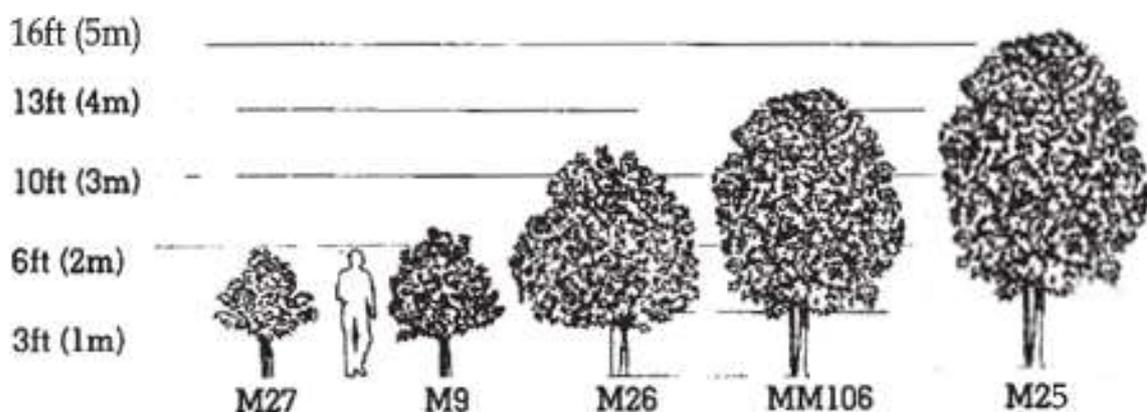
### **Size and Shape of Fruit Trees**



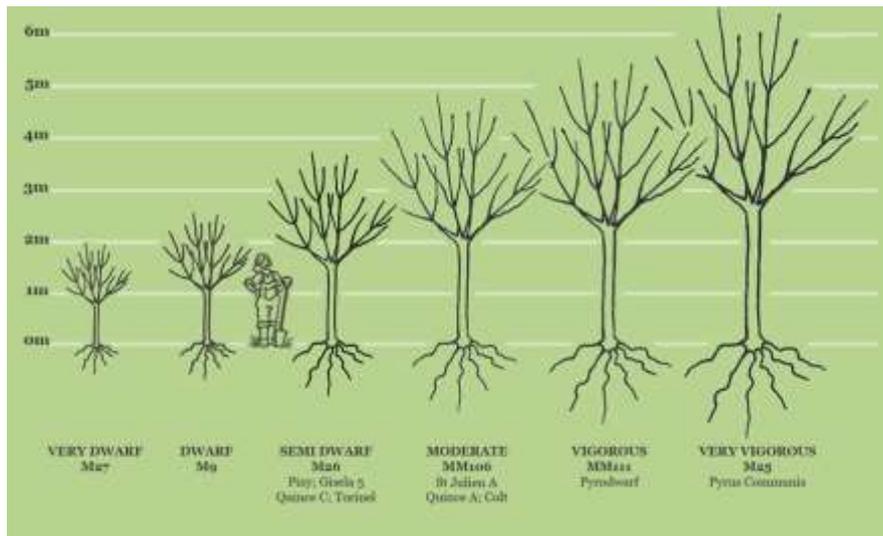
As I mentioned above, you can select trees to suit the size of your garden. Apple and Pear cultivars are grafted on to rootstocks which create a different height of tree. Apples are grafted on to crab apple rootstocks and pears on to quince rootstocks. It is the rootstock type that predicts the final height of the tree, but any cultivar can be grafted on to any rootstock. Once you've chosen your cultivar, decide which rootstock size you would like and you can buy it ready grafted.

See below for the range of rootstocks available.

### Apple rootstocks

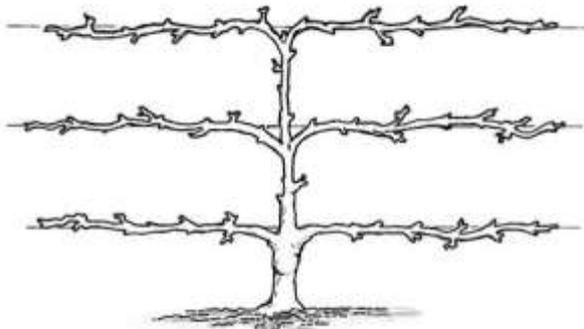


## Pear rootstocks

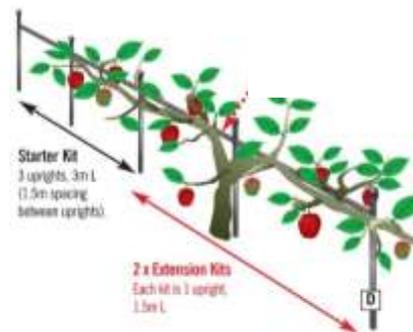


If space is not an issue you can choose an M25 rootstock tree that can grow up to 5/6 metres tall and 3 metres across. If you have limited space choose a smaller rootstock.

You can also grow a fruit tree to a specific shape against a fence or wall as a 'cordon' or 'espalier'. A 'step-over' is a small, low-growing espalier, which may only be 40cm tall. All of these need regular pruning to maintain their shape, but they will produce plenty of blossom and fruit.

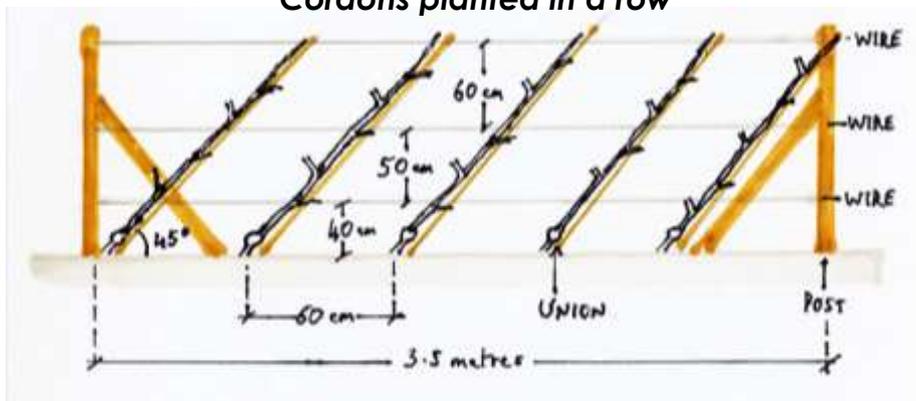


**Espalier with three tiers**



**Step-over with one tier**

### Cordons planted in a row



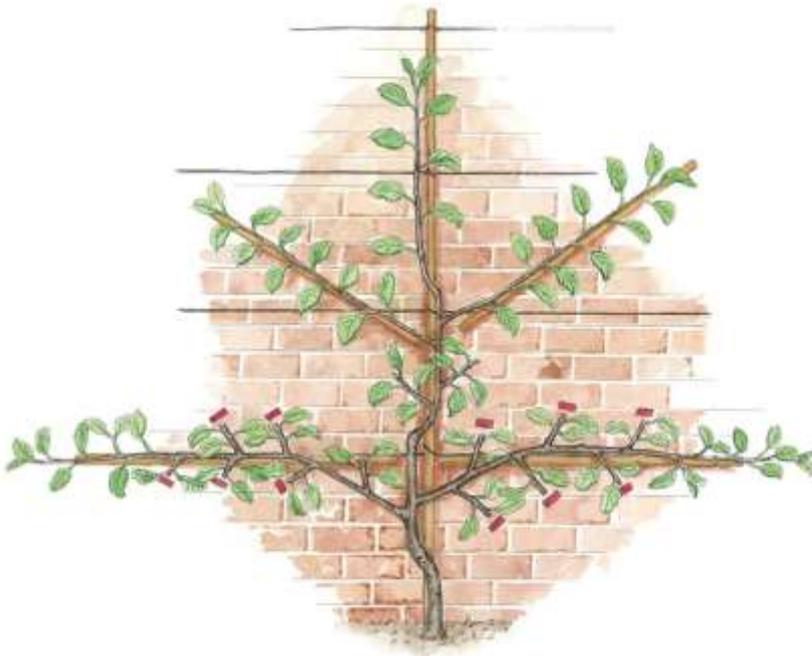
Cordons are probably the easiest smaller tree shape to establish and prune. Another advantage of cordons is that you can easily select two to three different cultivars and grow them together to ensure good pollination and fruiting in a small space.

## **Planting Trees**

### Location

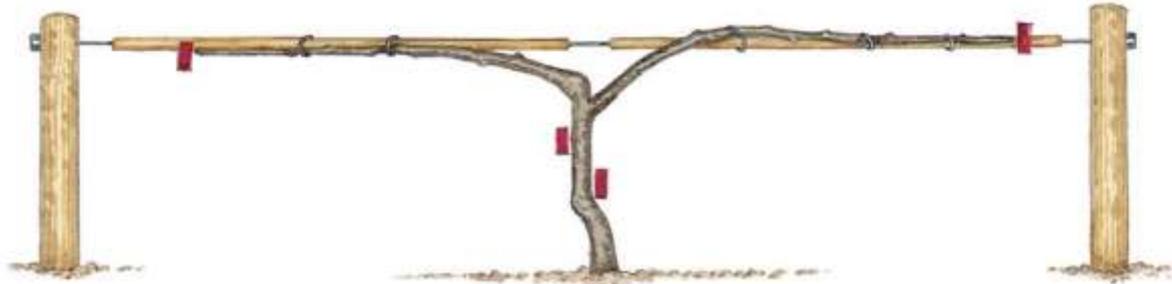
Apples and pears both need a sunny space, where fruit can ripen. They should also be sheltered from strong winds. You should keep a circle of 1 metre diameter around their trunks free of other plants so that you can mulch and fertilise the trees.

**Cordons** are best trained against a sunny wall or fence. You will need to put up supporting wires to tie in the branches (see diagram above).



**Espaliers** also need a sunny wall or fence with wires to support the branches. Decide how many 'tiers' you would like, leaving at least 30cm between each, and then put in the wires. As the tree grows cut out any growth except the horizontal branches and train these down to the horizontal using bamboo canes over two years (45 ° in year 1, 60 ° in year 2 and 90 ° by year three.)

**Step-overs** are traditional planted as low 'fences' of 35 – 45 cm high around vegetable or flower beds, but will still need support from stakes and wires until they are established (see below). You will need a M27 (dwarfing) rootstock for these.



Winter is a good time to plant these fruit trees, so they can establish their roots before the spring arrives. Before planting put the tree roots in a bucket of water for 30 minutes so they are well soaked. In the meantime, dig a hole twice the size of the rootball and add bonemeal fertiliser to the sides of the hole. Make sure you put in a supporting stake to hold the tree in place while the roots get established. Then place the trunk 10cm away from the stake with the roots below the soil level and the trunk above (use a cane to

check the planting height is correct). Fill in the hole with a mix of manure and soil and tread in the soil with your heel to make sure the roots are secure and air pockets removed. Finally, water in well.

### **More information and suppliers**

You will get the best choice of trees from specialist mail order nurseries; R V Roger are based in North Yorkshire and so their trees are used to cold conditions.

<https://www.ashridgetrees.co.uk/fruit-trees>

<https://www.orangepeppin.com/>

<http://www.rvroger.co.uk>

<https://www.victoriananursery.co.uk/>

<https://www.choicegardeningclub.co.uk/pruning-training-fruit-trees>

<https://www.thompson-morgan.com/fruit/fruit-trees>

**FOR TIPS ON FRUIT TREE PRUNING SEE PART TWO – AVAILABLE IN FEBRUARY 2018**