

# Picking apples and choosing trees

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About 3,700 farmers have planted 41,000 traditional apple trees under agri-environment schemes from REPS, AEOS and GLAS I. These orchards contribute greatly to genetic diversity. They provide a rich reservoir of rare alleles, possibly not present in modern cultivars, and contribute to Ireland's genetic heritage.

A key point for the 1,260 farmers currently choosing apples trees to plant before the deadline of 31 March 2017 is that they must buy traditional Irish varieties from the GLAS list available from Irish Seed Savers Association in Clare and a limited number of other outlets.

Secondly, most people who have not undertaken a horticulture course are unaware the apple trees are manually grafted on to rootstock. Therefore, there are two choices to be made: which rootstock and which variety. The choice may depend on what traditional trees are available at this stage if not already ordered. Rootstock determines the height of the tree. There is a choice of three in GLAS.

M26, the most dwarfing rootstock allowed in GLAS, results in a smaller tree up to 3m, produces fruit in three to four years; the tree will have a lifespan of 40 years and needs permanent staking. Two higher-yielding options are MM106, which grows to 4.5m and fruits in five to six years, and M111 which grows to 5.5m and produces fruit in seven to 10 years, living up to 100 years.

The choice of varieties from the list of over 70 approved for GLAS is very interesting. Apple trees are generally not self-fertile, which means that to set fruit they need a pollination partner of a different variety. Most need one, some need two. Apple varieties are divided into three flowering groups – early, mid-season and late. It's unlikely an early and a late-flowering variety will pollinate each other. If there is a crab apple within a mile, it can provide pollen for your apple trees. It does not matter if the pollen comes from another variety of apple tree or crab apple, the fruit will grow true to your tree's variety.

A mixture of varieties with different uses is a good idea: dessert or eaters; culinary or cookers; and cider. Dual-purpose varieties can be used as cooking apples early in the season and as dessert apples later on when they've sweetened up. Ripening times range from August to December. For example varieties such as Irish Peach and Widow's Friend ripen early, while late ripening varieties such as Ross Nonpareil and Sam Young wait until December.

I would encourage all farmers with traditional varieties to mark their trees with a permanent label showing the variety and rootstock and date of planting. This will make it more interesting and build up knowledge and expertise.



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Information on the apples from The Heritage Apples of Ireland by Michael Hennerty [www.irishseedsavers.ie](http://www.irishseedsavers.ie) 061 921866



## Gibbons Russet

- Uses: Dessert or Cider
- History: Kilkenny, Cork, Dublin, Meath
- Picking: Late August
- Size: Medium
- Flowering: Mid-season



**Conor Norris, James Comerford and Finn Keating, Co Waterford, picking apples in the traditional orchard in Teagasc Kildalton College.**



**Lough Tree**

- Uses: Dessert
- History: Wexford
- Picking: Mid August – mid September
- Size: Medium
- Flowering: Mid season



**Red Brandy**

- Uses: Dessert
- History: Kilkenny
- Picking: Early September
- Size: Medium
- Flowering: Late



**Kilkenny Pearmain**

- Uses: Dessert or Cooker
- History: Kilkenny
- Picking: Late August – mid September
- Size: Large
- Flowering: Late



**White Moss**

- Uses: Dessert or Cooker
- History: Kilkenny, Clare
- Picking: Late August
- Size: Medium
- Flowering: Late