



# **TREE CARE SHEET**

*for*

## **FUJI and GALA APPLE**

### **(Semi-Dwarf)**

**SITE SELECTION** Choose a sunny site with well-drained soil that is protected from strong winds. If the location has too much shade, the tree will produce less and lower quality fruit. You want full sun for at least 6 hours a day in late spring, in summer and in early fall.

Give your apple tree plenty of space for roots as well as crown. Good circulation around the tree helps prevent disease, and you'll need space to harvest and prune. Do not plant your apple tree in a lawn or with other plants that require frequent irrigation.

**WATER** How much water your tree needs depends on your soil, the temperature and wind, and the size of the tree, so you'll need to adjust as you go. Monitor the soil around the new tree and keep the root ball moist, but not wet. Avoid wetting the trunk. Depending on rain, your new tree may not need much irrigation until the weather is warm and new growth is several inches long.

In a moderate summer, your first-year apple is likely to need 5 to 10 gallons a week, applied every 1 to 2 weeks. As the tree grows, move the watering to the outer portion of the canopy. As the tree becomes mature, you'll also need to move to less frequent, deeper irrigation.

To evaluate your irrigation, observe your tree (drooping or failure to thrive could mean water problems) and occasionally dig into the soil to see how far down you are wetting. Weeding and mulching around the tree will keep down the amount of water you need. Be sure to keep the mulch 4- 6 inches away from the trunk.

**FERTILIZING** Most Alameda soils are sandy and fast draining and nutrients leach out quickly, so you'll likely need to fertilize. But be careful not to over-fertilize as this will cause excessive new growth and can burn the roots. Avoid using fertilizer stakes, as they might burn roots, even to the point of killing an immature tree.

Young apple trees should be fertilized with a nitrogen fertilizer three times, in March, May and July. Water the fertilizer in immediately. Mature trees should be fertilized with a fertilizer intended for fruit trees, according to the package directions. Apply half the annual fertilizer in the spring and the second half just after harvest. Apply in the root zone (under the whole canopy), not right at the base of the trunk. If the soil is very dry, irrigate a day before fertilizing as well as immediately afterwards.

**PRUNING AND BRANCH THINNING** Apple trees need to be pruned to develop a strong branch structure (to hold all of that fruit!) and encourage fruiting. There are several approaches to pruning – these directions are for the modified central leader shape frequently used for apple trees.

Right after planting the tree, cut it off to a short stick 24 to 30 inches high (1/4 inch above a bud or branch) and cut any side shoots remaining below that to one bud. This encourages low branching and equalizes the top and root system.

Generally, prune when the leaves are off (when the tree is dormant). It's easier to see what you are doing and removal of dormant buds (growing points) invigorates the remaining buds.

In the winter after the first growing season, select three to five horizontal branches, spaced evenly around tree and within a total of 2 to 3 vertical feet apart. Look to keep branches at an angle of around 45 degrees to the trunk if possible. These will be the first tier of your scaffold. Take off limbs (other than the leader) that may compete with the leader and these laterals. Head the leader if it is too vigorous compared to the rest of the tree. Always cut close to the branch collar or a bud, to avoid stubs.

In following years develop another series of laterals every two to three feet higher up the central leader, until the tree is the structure you want. If at any point you need to encourage branching and in any event when the tree is as tall as you want, cut off the central header. After that, you'll still need to prune to keep the tree the size you want. Summer pruning can be beneficial to slow down overly vigorous trees or to decrease the size of trees that are too large. It is usually done just after harvest.

*Other pruning tips:*

- Angle cuts at about 45° away from the nearby bud or stem.
- It may be necessary to spread laterals physically (spreading sticks or tie-downs) when five to six feet long to form the proper 45° angle with the trunk.
- When pruning a mature apple tree, remove about 20% of the prior year's growth, starting with weak, diseased or dead limbs; any limbs pointing downward; watersprouts and any sprouting below the grafting junction.
- Leave the small horizontal branches on the selected limbs for fruiting – apples develop at the ends of small branches or spurs.
- Keep the lower part of the tree wider than the upper part and prune as needed to allow sun into the center of the tree.

**FRUIT PRODUCTION** Apples sometimes naturally thin themselves. Known as "June drop," (though frequently in May here), small immature fruit just drop off the tree. Don't panic. After any natural drop when the fruit is about 3/4 inch in diameter, thin the remaining apples to one or two per cluster. It is really hard to make yourself do this, after waiting and working for your own fruit, but it will improve the quality and size of the fruit that's left, minimize branches breaking from too much weight and help the tree's health.

**REFERENCES:** [www.ucanr.homeorchard.edu](http://www.ucanr.homeorchard.edu) ; *The Home Orchard, Growing your Own Deciduous Fruit and Nut Trees*, University of California, Agriculture and Natural Resources, Pub. 3485