I’ve missed a few weeks writing my column due to hectic holidays and Influenza A, but I hope I am now back on track. Since I promised to follow the Pear varieties with information on Apple varieties, I’ll keep to that plan. Next week I think I should write about general gardening requirement in January, and then resume my treatise on fruit trees.

Apple trees prefer a deep soil and a pH of 6.5 to 7.0. We have that here in Smithville proper, and in areas that are up and down the Colorado River. If you have more alkaline soils, you may have trouble with Cotton Root rot and Collar Rot; these diseases can be limited by the selection of proper rootstocks, and fungicides, if required.

The main factor limiting selection is the chilling requirements discussed in earlier articles. I researched and found that Bastrop County was listed as 600-750 hours, but some local growers think we should look for varieties that do well at even lower chilling levels. Apples require cross-pollinization for best results, so choosing two varieties that bloom at similar times is suggested.

Following are some varieties suggested by the Texas Agri-LIFE Extension, Central Texas Gardener, and others.

- **‘Gala’** Requires at least 600 hours of chilling, and grows into a large tree to 30’H x wide (can be pruned to limit size). It requires regular rainfall or irrigation to produce the best crop; the apples are large with red striping on golden skin.
- **‘Imperial Gala’** A medium sized sport of ‘Gala’, very firm with same exterior coloring and yellow flesh.
- **‘Royal Gala’** This variety ripens to an all over red color, is medium sized, and the tree is more compact. Note that these three very similar varieties will not work as adequate pollinators for each other, so another variety is required nearby.
- **‘Mollie’s Delicious’** This apple is large, light yellow with a red blush, and good flavor and stores well for long periods. It requires 450-500 hours of chilling.
- **‘Pink Lady’** This variety has oblong fruit that is yellow at maturity with a pink or light red overlay. My sister swears this is the best tasting apple ever, and prefers it over all other varieties. It requires 500-600 hours of chill, and may require more pruning than other types noted here.
- **‘Fuji’** This is one of my favorite apples, because it is both crisp and somewhat tart. It bears medium sized fruit that is tall and rectangular in shape, with yellow-green skin with red to orange stripes. It also stores well in the refrigerator. It is also heat-resistant and requires approximately 600 chilling hours.
- ‘Mutsu’ (Also known as ‘Crispin’) This tree produces a large, round yellow fruit which is crisp and tart. It works well as both a table, dessert, and processing apple for applesauce and vinegar. Requires 600 hours of chilling.

- ‘Granny Smith’ This bright green apple is another favorite of mine, and requires 600-750 hours of chill. I’m going to give it a try here and will report on my success over time. The tree is smaller, about 15’ high and wide, and the apples are very crisp and store well over a long period.

In researching this I found recommendations that you look for rootstocks M9 or M7 for compact apple trees. Another publication suggested M7 or MM 111 as being the two most common stock among both commercial and home plantings. There will be some pruning required each year to maintain the tree, and again I refer you to specific books on the subject.

Use, at a minimum, a 3" compost mulch, and perhaps an additional organic fertilizer such as Micro-life, Lady-bug, or other brand; go for one with a higher middle number such as 4-6-4. That middle number is for phosphorus which is needed from proper fruiting. Apply the mulch anytime, and the fertilizer in March and perhaps again in June or July.

Some products that may be needed for insect and disease control are wettable sulfur, Actinovate, or Serenade for fungal problems, and dormant oil spray, Organicide or Kaolin Clay for pest control.