

Irish Seed Savers Association



Delivery of Graft Request

After six weeks the first signs of 'bud burst' should be observable. In this photo if you look closely you can see young leaves emerging.

The buds are strong enough to push through the grafting wax unassisted. **The area above the graft is still too weak and delicate to tolerate handling**; do not remove grafting wax from this area.



If after 6 weeks the buds show no sign of growing then it is probable that the graft has failed. If all the grafts have failed (i.e. the minimum of two of a particular variety have both failed) then please contact our office within 9 weeks of the graft date; provide your contact details so we can offer you a repeat attempt graft next year, free of charge. Check our website for a guide to best quality scion wood to improve the chances of success next year.

The next step is to remove the grafting tape from around the graft union. This is done to release the growing tree from the tight restriction of the tape. It is important to wait until the graft has 'taken' – buds are growing, and the cambium of the rootstock has healed together with the cambium of the grafted variety. It is recommended you wait until 6 weeks after graft date to perform this step. It is usually acceptable to wait until the eight week without problems. But leaving too long will restrict the trees growth.

Do not handle the upper portion of the tree above the graft union

Find the knot of the tape and with a sharp knife cut the tape directly behind this knot. The tape should then easily unravel and the grafting wax covering the taped area will fall away. It should be possible to achieve this step without cutting the tree itself.



The rootstock is the portion of the tree below the graft union. This rootstock usually sends out its own buds to leaf. These buds/leaves must be '*rubbed off*' as they are genetically the rootstock rather than the grafted variety. By rubbing off these buds it is ensured that the energy to grow is concentrated into the desired variety (the scion wood).

It is important to observe the tree regularly and perform this action when rootstock buds show. Regularly doing this minimises wasted growth. Earlier removal means lesser damage and less risk of disease due to poorly healed wounds.

The below photo sequence should provide a useful guide:



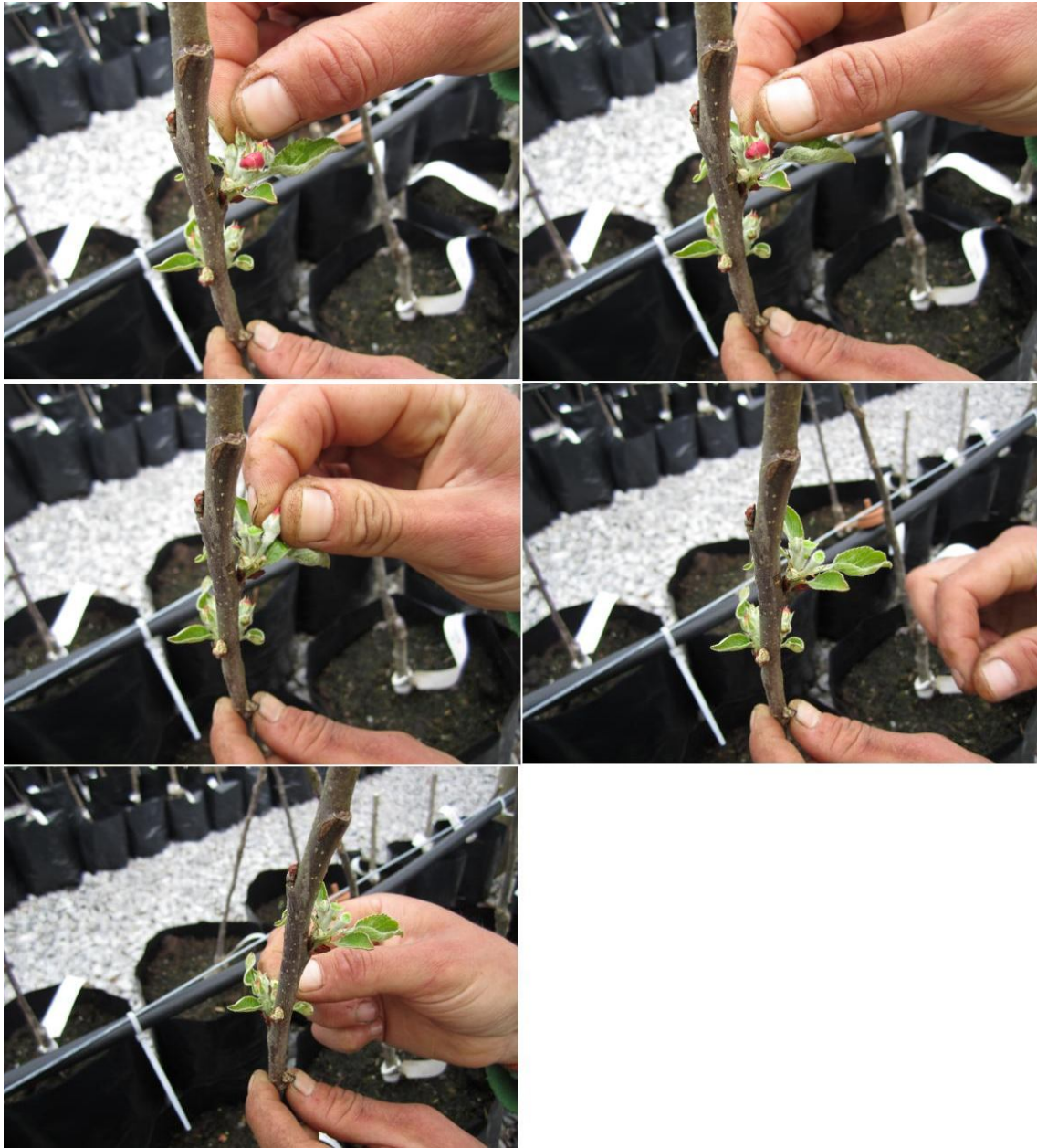


If the Young Grafted Tree Flowers

Do not handle the upper portion of the tree above the graft union, it is still too weak.

A young grafted tree does not have its fruit bearing structure established yet. Allowing the tree to bear fruit in its first year risks damage. Mature apples may be too much weight for its young structure. Early fruit bearing may stunt the tree as it slows vegetative growth. The goal is to concentrate energy on growing a good fruit bearing structure for future years.

Pinch out all flower buds according to the below photo sequence:



Newly formed fruitlets can be treated in the same manner.

Continuing Care During Summer Months

The young tree should at this stage have a strong shoot of several inches long.

Sometimes more than one shoot emerges strongly. In this case it is necessary to choose one 'leader' as the strong central growth for the trees' stem. If the highest shoot is sufficiently strong then this should be selected as the leader. However in the event that a lower shoot is stronger, then prune off the scion wood at a point just above the chosen shoot. ***Be careful not to confuse a rootstock shoot with the variety shoot!***

Other shoots from the variety should be carefully removed. The unwanted shoots may be pruned off using secateurs or alternatively they may be broken off at the base.

(Note! This requires delicate and careful manipulation – take care that the graft union is not accidentally broken).

Keep the young tree in a sunny position sheltered from heavy winds but with sufficient ventilation to prevent mould or other fungal attack. Place the pot such that the leading shoot comes out at the north side of the stem. This ensures that the shoot orientates itself vertically to get to as much sun as possible, therefore ensuring a straight stem (if it were faced south it may lean away out towards the sun and so result in a bent stem shape)

If the shoot grows out at an angle to the vertical then it should be tied to a bamboo or other support and trained upright. Be careful that the tie is not damaging the bark of the tree – choose a horticultural tape or else insulating tape, soft plastic or a loose & wide rubber band. *The tie should not be too tight that it chokes or restricts flow of sap up the tree.*

Throughout the summer months the tree should be regularly observed:

- Watering may be necessary if there is a dry spell or sunny weather lasting several days. Best to check the soil in the pot with your fingers to check moisture levels. Be careful not to over-water: it is not healthy for a fruit tree to stand in water logged conditions.
- Watch for pests such as aphids or caterpillars, they may attack leaves and so reduce photosynthesis, therefore checking the trees growth.
- Keep the soil weed free – weeds are competition for nutrients.
- Pinch out any rootstock shoots if they re-emerge. If a sucker comes up from the roots, this should also be removed.
- Liquid feed may be applied as foliar sprays – such as liquid seaweed, horsetail, comfrey or nettle tea (a foliar feed every 2 to 3 weeks is sufficient).

The young tree should be suitable for planting out in the ground in Autumn. Give the roots a generous watering at time of planting. If the weather is extremely dry in its first few weeks in the ground be sure to water it regularly – its young roots will take a few weeks to establish themselves in the soil. See tree planting guidelines for further details.