

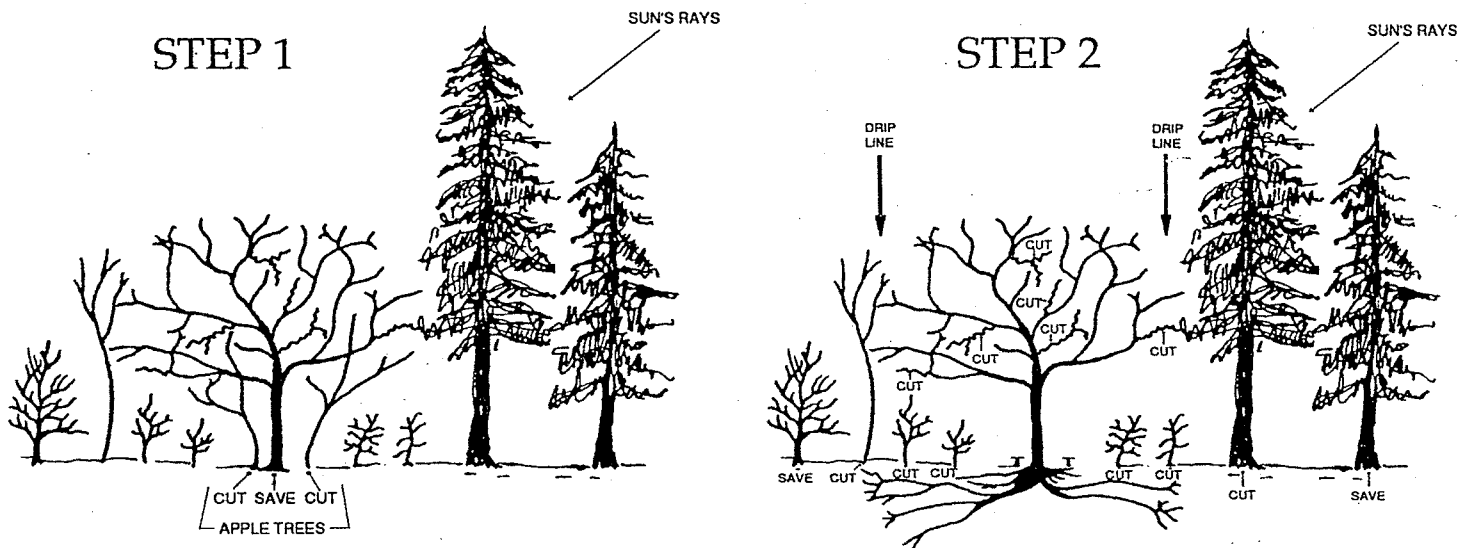
THE CARE OF WILD APPLE TREES

David Olson & Clarence Langer

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Wild apple trees are one of the important wildlife food plants found in New England. They are used by many game species including white tailed deer, ruffed grouse, snowshoe hare, cottontail rabbit and grey squirrels. Apples or apple seeds have been found in the stomachs of fox, fisher, porcupine, bobcat and red squirrel. Apple trees also provide good habitat for woodcock and many songbirds including bluebirds, fly catchers, robins and orioles. New England is fortunate in having many apple trees growing naturally in the wild, but many are being lost each year.

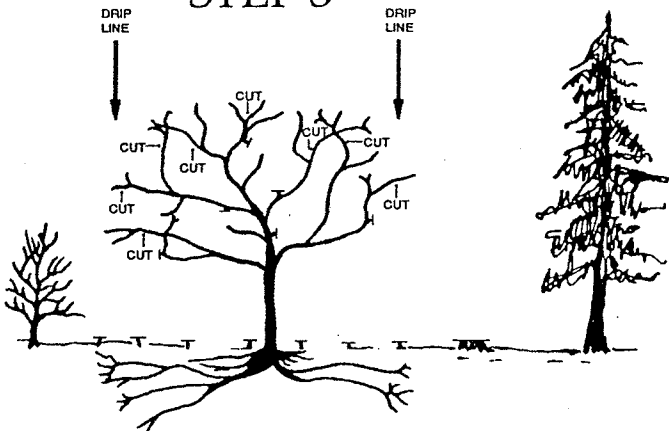
Wild apple trees normally become established in clearings or on the edges of fields, but as the forests grow these trees are crowded by shrubs and shaded by over-topping trees. Prolonged periods of crowding and shading will cause a decline in vigor, eventually leading to death and a loss of these apple trees for wildlife use. The length of life, vigor, and yield of these wild apple trees can be improved with some simple techniques which are commonly used by foresters and orchardists today. This bulletin describes these techniques in a step by step procedure.



Carefully examine the apple tree. Look for dead branches, diseased wood in the trunk, and the presence of more than one stem. If there is more than one stem, select the largest and most vigorous and remove the smaller competing stems by cutting them off as near the ground as possible. If the largest stem is badly diseased or broken, remove it and select the next largest, most vigorous stem for improvement.

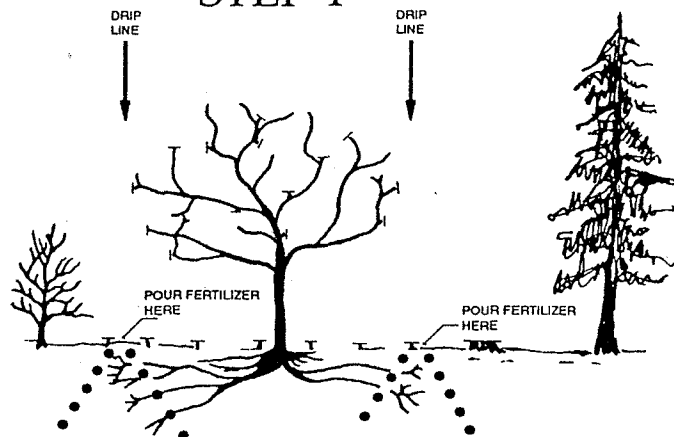
Remove all other shrubs and trees back to the drip line of the apple tree. If the tree is shaded over by large over-topping trees, remove these on at least three sides, especially towards the south. Remove all the dead branches from the apple tree. Cut these off with a pruning saw or pruning shears as close to the living branches as possible.

STEP 3



Remove approximately one third of the remaining live growth. In so doing, attempt to open up thick clusters of branches. Clip off one to two feet from the ends of vigorous side branches or vertical sucker shoots. Do not remove the short spur branches which grow on the sides of larger branches because they are the fruit bearing branches. If the tree is a young sapling with few side branches, the top may be cut off to encourage branching.

STEP 4



Fertilize the tree by pouring a liquid solution of calcium nitrate or ammonium nitrate fertilizer in a narrow band around the tree directly below the drip line. Fertilizer in this narrow band will spread out and become available to the feeder roots as it seeps into the ground. Use five pounds of fertilizer for a large tree and three pounds for a medium sized tree. For very small trees or saplings, use one pound of fertilizer at least three feet from the base of the tree.

A lightweight chain saw, a pruning saw with a ten foot handle, and long-handled pruning shears are useful tools for working on wild apple trees. Fertilizer can be mixed in an ordinary pail or watering can with the sprinkler head removed.

The brush, apple tree branches, and trees which are removed can be piled to form a brush pile for wildlife cover. This is especially effective where cottontail rabbits are abundant. A better brush pile is produced where brush is piled over rocks, stumps or logs. For deer, ruffed grouse and snowshoe hare, there is little need to pile the brush.

In grouse habitat, it may be helpful to leave dense conifer or brush growth close to the apple tree on one side for escape and roosting cover. Where possible, this should be on the north side of the tree.

If there are very large trees to be removed, it may be faster and safer to girdle the tree and leave it standing. Girdling is accomplished by cutting completely through the bark in a ring around the tree. Spraying cut stumps of trees and brush with chemical herbicides will retard sprouting. Do not use chemical sprays on apple tree stumps as they may be connected to the roots of the tree you wish to save.

The effects of fertilizing will last approximately three years, but for maximum growth the tree can be fertilized every year.

The minimum size clearing for the health and vigor of the apple tree has been described in these instructions. Most species of wildlife benefit from clearings in brushy or wooded areas and would benefit from larger clearings around apple trees.