



By Buzz Bertolero

The Dirt Gardener

Q: A volunteer apple tree has sprouted up in my compost pile. Is it worth the effort to dig it up and put it in a pot? Does this tree require grafting onto another rootstock for it to be a viable, producing apple tree?

A: Volunteer fruit trees are always a gamble since the genetics of the parents is unknown. The fruit from those trees started from a seed are always unpredictable and there are no guarantees it will produce in the first place.

Besides deciduous fruit trees, such as apricots, peaches, pears, plums, etc., this also applies to citrus and avocados.

Those trees started from vegetative parts produce fruit that are a mirror image of the originating tree. These trees are not growing on their own root. Instead, they are budded or grafted onto a different plant or rootstock. Hence, the shoots or suckers they produce will not be clones of the desirable variety.

Fruit trees are budded onto different rootstocks to restrict their growth or to make a variety more tolerant to soil conditions or pests. Trees with multiple varieties on the same trunk have been grafted.

So, back to your question: Is it worth the time and effort? Probably not, if you're looking for a productive tree; but it is a judgment call on your part. More than likely, your expectations will not be fulfilled; however, there are exceptions.

If you're curious to see what develops, then I would dig it up and transplant it into a pot. Several years from now, you'll be able to then answer the question. The tree can always be budded and grafted at some other point in time.

This is an excellent time to purchase fruit trees, as the selection of varieties at your favorite garden center is the best during these winter months. It's also a good source of grafting wood. Many garden centers will let you take some cuttings off the different varieties. You just need to ask first.

Q: My daffodil bulbs have started to grow. Does this mean I didn't plant them deep enough?

A: Yes, the planting depth can influence the growth of daffodil bulbs. Actually, it's about the right time that they should be popping out of the ground. It can vary from year to year by a couple of weeks.

The growth is the function of the soil temperature and when they were planted. Those bulbs planted early in the fall, when the soil is still warm, sprout earlier while those planted after the soil has cooled off take longer to develop. It's more of a common occurrence when we have a late-November heat spell.

Those shallow-planted bulbs do sprout earlier because they warm up sooner. It can also indicate a mild winter and that spring is right around the corner. Whatever the reason, there is nothing to be concerned about.

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CAPTION: Trees that are grafted onto a different plant or rootstock will produce fruit that is a mirror image of the originating tree.

