



ORGANIC APPLE GROWING

PART 1. GETTING STARTED

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Pome fruits are, quite possibly, the most difficult crops to grow organically. The long time period one must care for the crop, usually six to seven months, and the vast array of insects, mites and fungi which attack apples are just some of the unique challenges an organic apple grower faces. A recent article pertaining to apple pest control from the *Cornell Extension News Service* stated that just over sixty

even with per bushel prices much higher than for conventionally grown fruit. Also presenting difficulty for the grower is the thirty-six month transition period before fruit can be organically certified. **Transitional apples**, for the most part, bring no better return than conventional apples, and the pack-out will almost certainly be less.

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species cause economic damage to apples. About half of these pests are significant, in that control measures are recommended. In comparison with other fruits, there are seven significant pests for tart cherry and plum, twelve for peach and seventeen for pear. This information is from New York sources, but I doubt the numbers are much different in the midwest.

With this prelude in mind, you may begin to understand why there are not large numbers of apple growers jumping into the organic market,

growing can be achieved anywhere in the United States. Here is how to get started:

1 Determine your level of experience. If you are already an apple grower, you may have a big head start. You already know the approximate timing and many of the cultural methods needed to grow apples. You are just going to use different products and learn to look at your crop in a different light. Begin asking yourself this: "What is it to grow 100% clean, conventional apples,

CRITICAL LEAF NUTRIENT LEVELS FOR APPLE CROPS - JULY

NITROGEN		POTASSIUM		CALCIUM	MAGNESIUM	SODIUM	CHLORINE	ZINC	BORON	
deficient below (%)	adequate range (%)	deficient below (%)	adequate range (%)	adequate over (%)	adequate over (%)	excess over (%)	excess over (%)	adequate over (ppm)	deficient below (ppm)	excess over (ppm)
1.9	2.0-2.4	1.0	1.2	1.0	0.25	?	0.3	18.0	20.0	100.0

For all fruit and nut crops, the following levels are adequate: Phosphorus (P) 0.1-0.3%, Copper (Cu) over 4 ppm and Manganese (Mn) over 20 ppm.

*Source: University of California Cooperative Extension TREE TOPICS, Vol. 27, Issue 4

if you're looking at a market that, adjusted for inflation, pays no more than it did 20 years ago?"

2 Embrace an apple I.P.M. program. Integrated Pest Management is learning how to identify pests through trapping and visual inspection, learning the timing of when these pests will show up in your orchard, and understanding when these pests will start costing you money (called the economic threshold). It is not difficult to come to grips with these concepts, and I.P.M. will save you a lot of money. (You will not be soaking the orchard with chemicals every ten to fourteen days as you may have been used to.) There are several good "How To" manuals for I.P.M., including:

- ♦ Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, may still offer an I.P.M. video tape and accompanying manual.
- ♦ Michigan State offers a 36-page guide called "Apple Insect Scouting Manual," Great Lakes Publishing, 342 S. Union St. Sparta, MI 49345.
- ♦ A 214 page manual called "Integrated Pest Management for Apples and Pears", University of California, Publication #3340, Phone: 510-642-2431.
- ♦ Mid-Atlantic Orchard Monitoring Guide, 361 pages. This one costs \$75 but it is a well-organized reference.

3 As soon as your apple trees begin to "harden off" have leaf analysis and soil samples taken. While both tests are important, leaf analysis gives a far more accurate picture of

the nutrient status of the tree being measured. Timing for leaf analysis for my area is mid- to late July. This is a very important step! You are flying blind without these tests. See the chart above for help interpreting your leaf analysis.

4) There are several catalogues which offer organic products, services, and, in some cases, advice for the organic apple grower. Some of them are:

- ♦ I.M.F., Wenatchee, WA. Phone: 1-800-332-3179
- ♦ Harmony Farm Supply, Sebastopol, CA. Phone: 707-823-9125.
- ♦ Peaceful Valley Farm Supply, Grass Valley, CA. Phone: 1-888-784-1722
- ♦ Natural Solutions, New Castle, VA, Phone: 703-864-5103.
- ♦ Gardens Alive, 5100 Schenley Place, Lawrenceburg, IN. 47025, Phone: 513-354-1482

