

# Why gardeners choose dwarfing apple rootstocks

*Tim Sansom explains*

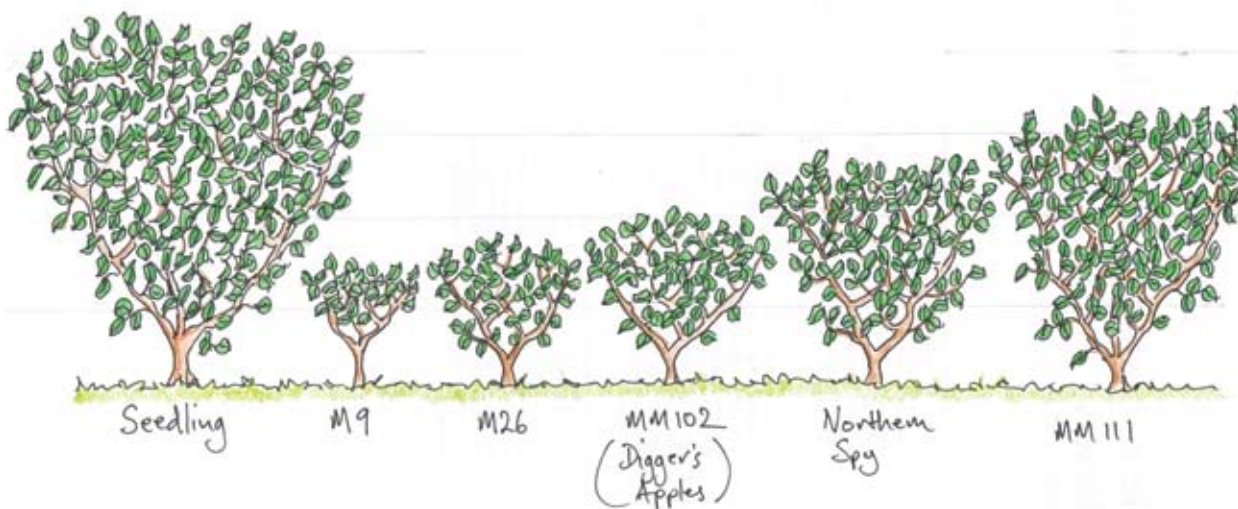
There are a number of things a gardener needs to know when choosing fruit trees for the garden, including pollination, ripening time and bird protection, but an aspect that always seems to generate more questions than answers is rootstocks. There is good reason for the confusion, because it is a complicated science, where orchardists and tree breeders are striving to manage their fruit trees for optimum yield and minimal care, whilst gardeners want small trees that are easy to prune, pick and spray.

Much of the research into apple stocks has been undertaken at the East Malling Research Station in Kent, and the John Innes Research Institute at Merton. The names of these rootstocks may not be all that imaginative, but they indicate from where the stocks originate. Those that begin with just “M” are from Malling, whilst those with “MM” are the result of collaboration between Merton and Malling. These still form the mainstay of rootstocks used for apples in Australia.

When choosing an apple rootstock there are three main points to consider, and these are:

- i) Tree vigour (dwarf / full size) NB *Dwarf rootstocks do not change fruit size*
- ii) Disease resistance (particularly woolly aphid)
- iii) Stability in the ground

Below is a short description of some of the more common apple rootstocks with the important characteristics of each. All Digger’s apples are grafted onto MM102 as we feel this is the best stock for home gardeners, with the best mix of characteristics for small-scale production.



Rootstock	Notes
<i>MM111</i>	A vigorous rootstock (75 – 80% of mature seedling) suited to heavy soils. Good anchorage, woolly aphid and collar rot resistance, better suited to orchard areas with nutrient deficient soils.
<i>NORTHERN SPY</i>	A semi vigorous rootstock (70% of mature seedling) with resistance to woolly aphid, anchors well in the ground without support.
<i>M9</i>	True dwarf rootstock (30% of mature seedling), susceptible to woolly aphid, poor anchorage (needs support), early bearer (used for high density orchard plantings).
<i>M26</i>	A dwarfing rootstock (40% of mature seedling) that is mildly susceptible to woolly aphid and collar rot, will perform better with some support via a trellis or stakes.
<i>MM102</i>	A dwarfing version of Northern Spy (45% of mature seedling) with woolly aphid resistance and good anchorage. Good mix of vigour, resistance and stability for espalier training. (Digger’s apples are on this stock).