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A few sunny days remind us that spring is on its way. It's time to snap off the winter doldrums and gear up for the season. One of our early March chores is grafting fruit trees.

To propagate an apple or pear tree, we graft a twig on to a rootstock. The twig determines the variety of fruit, while the rootstock determines the size of the tree. Most of the folks we give trees to have plenty of space, so we use standard rootstocks that make a full sized tree. The apples are grafted on to *malis domestica*, and the pears on to *pyrus calleryana*.

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My dad taught me how to graft when I was a kid. He learned how in grade school, as it was a common skill all kids were taught a few generations ago. It's very easy to do.

Grafting is an ancient art, practiced thousands of years ago. Seedling fruit trees have a small chance of producing large, good quality fruit. Out of many seedlings, only a few will be worth propagating. When we graft, we are cloning that particular variety.

A razor sharp knife cuts an inch long, smooth surface along a small seedling. A similar cut is made on a twig about the size of a pencil from the tree you want/ a vertical slit is cut in both and they are slipped together and wrapped in masking tape.

The cambium layers must match up. Directly underneath the bark, the bright green cambium divides cells and grows the tree. When we cut the top off a tree and put a new one on, the matched up cambium layers join together and the buds on the twig swell, sprout and grow,

making the new tree.

I teach folks how to graft, and propagate a few hundred apple and pear trees every year. The old time fruit trees around Macon County can be saved by bringing me a twig of last year's growth in early March. I'm happy to propagate a tree for you.

The trees grafted last year are ready to plant. Come over and get some if you want. They are free, but you have to tell me you'll tend to them properly. That means you'll keep deer away as they love to eat young fruit trees. It also means cultivating around the tree to keep grass and weed competition down.

We've got a good old pear from the Bethany Road, the old Arkansas Black apple, a few summer varieties and a few from Thomas Jefferson's orchard in Monticello, Va. Helping folks get orchards going is a small thing our farm can do to say thank you for all the help Macon County has given us over the years. Let me know if you have a tree you'd like propagated, or if you need a few trees for your place.