Upland Wildlife Habitat Management (645)
Mast/Apple Tree Release

NH Implementation Requirement ***NH-645***

Producer:		**Planner:**	
Address:		**County:**	
Farm Name:		**Date:**	
Contract/app:		**Farm/Tract:**	

Number (or #/acre) of mast trees to be released	
List of species targeted for mast tree release	
Site Specific Guidelines and Recommendations	

Plans Meet NRCS Standards and Specs

Planner Signature: Date:

Participant Agrees to the outlined plan:

Participant Signature: Date:

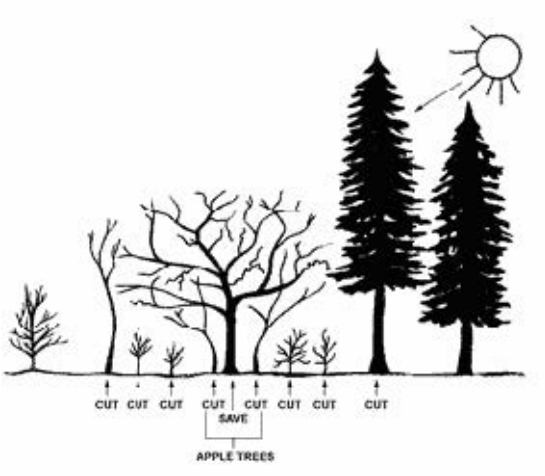
Purpose and Background

The purpose of this activity is to treat upland wildlife habitat concerns to provide food and cover to sustain wildlife. Wild apple trees provide a good source of food (fruit, browse, nectar) and cover for a variety of game and non-game wildlife including pollinators, deer, grouse, turkey, nesting songbirds, bats, and many other species.

Apple Tree Release Guidelines

Generally, apple trees are found in prior open areas such as old clearings, idle fields and field edges because the tree grows best in full sunlight. As the forest matures around the apple trees, they are crowded and shaded and lose their vigor and ability to fruit and sometimes ‘crowd’ itself as internal branches compete for space and sunlight which limits fruiting. By following these simple steps to "release" the tree you will be able to improve the growing conditions for these trees, improve flowering and fruiting, and potentially provide early successional habitat.

Figure 1- Before Release and Pruning



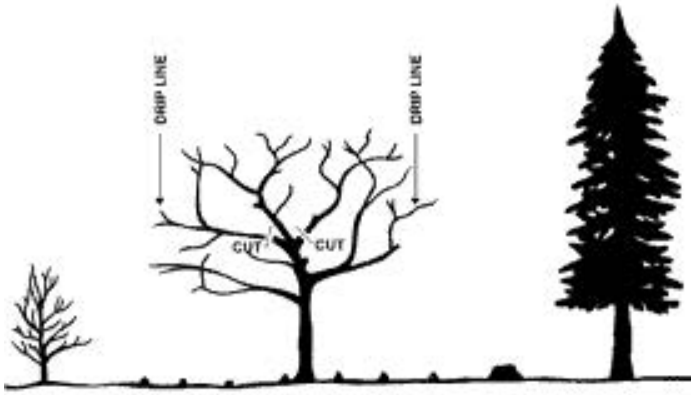


Figure 2- After Release and Pruning

Area Selection

By choosing one or two isolated trees to release it may provide a potential food source but may have limited additional benefits. Selecting old orchards or areas where there are numerous trees together will provide the necessary trees for cross pollination and also provide early successional habitat.

Release Techniques and Guidelines

Examine the apple trees and choose the healthiest ones to retain if they are growing in the same general space. Remove or girdle any trees that are growing into the tree and all other shrubs and trees growing next to the apple tree or underneath it, within the drip line of the tree's canopy (see Figure 1 and 2).

In most circumstances, this will require removal or girdling of shading trees to the East, West and South of the apple tree. To increase the use of the apple trees by grouse and other species, it is a good idea to leave thick brushy cover nearby, preferably on the North side.

Pruning

Prune late February-early April, before bud break. Look for the branch collar (Fig 3. ring of tissue around the base of the branch). Cut should be made at the branch collar, not farther back. Do not cut off the collar.

Remove all the diseased and dead branches and limbs from the apple tree. Cut these off with a pruning saw or pruning shears as close to the living tissue as possible. It is advisable to clean pruning tools before starting another tree. Remove branches that cross or rub against one another or that are drooping and low. When pruning, it is best to select for strong branches with wide crotch angles (near 90 degrees) to the main stem. Remove branches that cross or rub against one another or that are drooping and low. When pruning, it is best to select for strong branches with wide crotch angles (near 90 degrees) to the main stem.

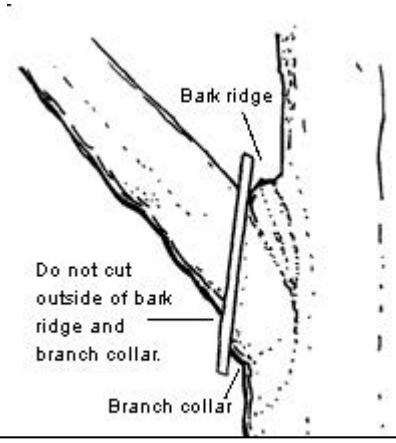
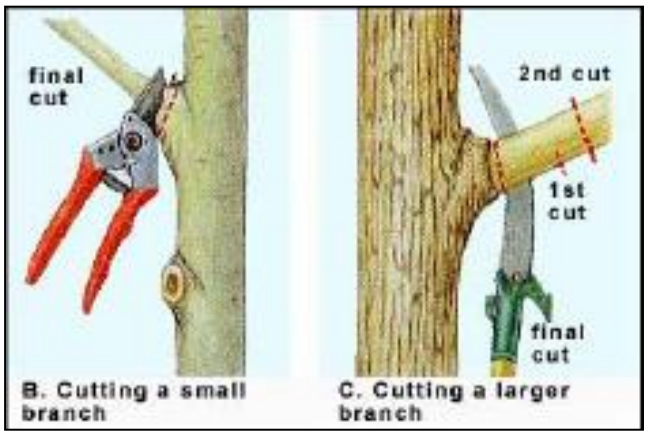


Figure 3- Note branch collar and bark ridge when pruning

General Pruning Techniques Diagram



Remove upright growing shoots or 'water sprouts'. Water sprouts are excessively vigorous and rarely fruit well. Minimize 'topping' and 'tipping' and try to work with the shape of the existing tree instead of trying to shape it to the way you think it should look. These trees do not have to have perfect form to provide fruit for wildlife.

Maintenance

Remove new trees that sprout up beneath and around the apple tree to ensure that they do not shade it. Shrubs beneath the tree should also be removed. However, allow shrubs sprouting in the openings around the tree to grow. Prune water sprouts and other branches as needed.

Certification Statement: I certify that implementation of this conservation practice is complete, meets criteria for the stated purpose(s), and meets the NRCS conservation practice standard and specifications.

☐ Yes ☐ No

Planner Signature: Date:

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