

Tree of the Month, September 2016: Apple (*Malus pumila* 'Lobo')

Apples (*Malus pumila*) are among the most widely grown and eaten fruits on the planet. The species is a cultigen, which means it is known only in cultivation, the product of thousands of years of domestication. *Malus pumila* is descended from the wild apple species *Malus sieversii*, from the mountains of Central Asia, and European crabapple (*Malus sylvestris*). Apples thrive in temperate climates and are grown on every continent except Antarctica.

In the 1990s an orchard of Canadian heritage apple varieties was planted in VanDusen's Canadian Heritage Garden. Although these apples were bred to be cold-hardy, they are susceptible to diseases such as anthracnose, apple scab and canker in our damp coastal climate. Over the years we have had to remove trees as they succumbed to infection and we are now embarking on a plan to replace the entire collection over the next couple of years. A few trees remain, and the healthiest of these survivors is a cultivar called 'Lobo'.

'Lobo' was bred from 'McIntosh' in 1898 at the Central Experimental Farm in Ottawa, Ontario. The large red and gold fruits begin to ripen in late August, which is quite early in the apple season. The flesh is sweet, mildly acidic and good for eating fresh, baking or making cider.

Apples are mostly pollinated by bees and near the orchard we maintain hives of western honey bees (*Apis mellifera*) and nesting boxes for orchard mason bees (*Osmia lignaria*). The next step of the Heritage Orchard renovation will begin in October, when we will remove the last of the diseased trees and leave the area fallow for a year or more to eliminate disease-causing fungal spores. In preparation for planting, we are assembling a new collection of hardy apples and other fruit trees with an emphasis on disease-resistance and adaptability to our wet climate. 'Lobo' can be found in the Heritage Orchard near the Maze and Vegetable Garden. The fruits are already ripening!

