

Scionwood storage (a procrastinator's delight; cut now, use later)

by Greg Giuliani

Following is my almost-never-fail scion wood storage technique. A primary goal of scion wood storage should be maintaining the scion's internal moisture. In my opinion, successful fruit tree grafting is a function of both good grafting technique and our ability to keep the scion hydrated until the graft wound heals.

Taking Scion Wood Cuttings

1. Cut scions while tree is dormant, before buds begin to swell. If scion buds open, moisture may escape from the scion, possibly dehydrating the scion to the point of graft failure.
2. The best scion wood material is last summer's new growth, because young tissue has superior wound healing ability. A growth collar marks the beginning of the youngest growth. From the (terminal) bud at the end of the branch, work your way back along the shoot until you see a ring around the diameter. I suggest making your initial cutting an inch or so down the limb from the growth ring.
3. Cuttings of pencil-sized diameter scions are the most versatile. I prefer longer scions (if possible) because the tapering shaft gives multiple choices when matching host branch diameter.
4. Select healthy looking material, growing at approximately 45-degree angles. Supposedly, scions from angled branches produce fruit buds sooner than shoots growing straight upward.
5. After harvesting, label scions with proper variety name and securely bundle like scions together.

Storage of the Scion wood

Shortly after harvesting or receiving scion material, I recommend sealing the cut ends of the scion with water-based sealant such as latex paint or tree seal. If you have a long bag leave the terminal bud on - then you have only one wound to seal. The sealed ends retard scion dehydration. Apply sealant to any area where the cambium has been broken.

Folks have recommended dipping scions into 10 percent chlorine, 90 percent water solution. This is optional and a good idea when bringing in scions from outside your home orchard, especially if you do not know the scion's origin. Sanitizing helps reduce the risk of spreading disease. Dip scions in bleach solution after sealant has dried, because the solution may damage any exposed cambium tissue.

Bundle like scion varieties together. Individual scion bundles should already be labeled. When dealing with multiple fruit varieties it helps keep things straight by bagging apple scions separate from pear scions, etc. If you have only a few scions total it's not a big deal. There are various different, effective ways to store scions.

Chatting with fellow club members you'll be able to learn a variety of scion storage methods. I prefer storing scions in clear plastic bags, large Zip-lock type bags work great.

Here's my scion storage recipe:

A scion storage bag should be air tight when closed, therefore longer than the scion length. Place a moist folded piece of paper towel inside the plastic bag containing scions. Paper towel size depends on the bag size. Use a piece big enough to keep high humidity within the storage bag. Lay the bag flat in the fridge; the moistened paper towel should be separated from the scions. Try to place the moistened towel at the lowest part of the bag. A few dew-type droplets should form and remain on the inside top of the bag. These droplets signify that the bag has good humidity inside. High humidity helps keep the scion hydrated. Store scions in refrigerator or similar dark, cool place, 35-40 degrees, do not allow scions to freeze. Freezing most likely will render the scion wood useless (dead).

Do not store scions with apples (or other ripening fruit), as apples emit ethylene gas, which encourages scion's buds to break dormancy. Observe the storage bag every couple weeks. If little or no dew is inside the top of the bag, re-hydrate the paper towel. A properly sealed plastic bag should not require more moisture to be added. Your scion should emerge from storage with no shrivel marks on its exterior. At the end of storage, underneath the scion's skin, the cambium should appear green. If it's not a healthy looking green, then the scion probably has lost viability. The scion's buds should be closed. Opening buds make successful grafting more difficult because moisture can escape causing the scion to de-hydrate.

Good luck grafting this spring.