

Autumn/Winter 2024

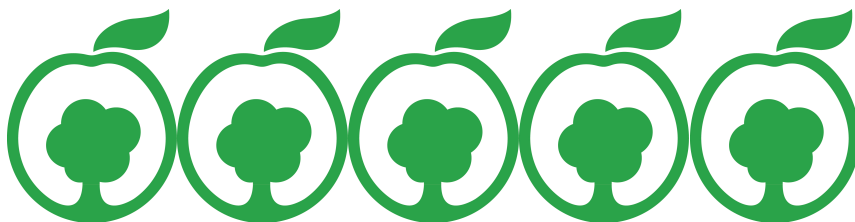
Volume 24

Orchard Link News

‘Saving orchards in South Devon’



See ‘News from the nurseries’



ORCHARD LINK

Orchard Link is a south Devon organisation set up in 1998 by apple and cider enthusiasts concerned about the disappearance of traditional orchards in the area. Its purpose is to promote the restoration and extension of orchards by offering technical advice and support to both existing owners and individuals or groups planting trees for the first time.

At the moment, the committee meets every other month either in person or by Zoom.

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Editors

Copy deadline for the next issue: mid-October '25.

Henry Wainwright and Tattwa Gyani



Chairman's bite of the apple



Reflecting on Orchard Link's past year, I can report that we have a steady membership (nearly 160, spread across south Devon), of whom over 40 hired our three apple-pressing kits (fewer than last year, maybe because of a patchier harvest). We have had some new community orchards join us (there are now nearly 30 listed on our webpages), and we ran a good programme of courses and events. We have nearly 300 followers on our Facebook group and Twittter/X. And we are in a good place financially (net balance sheet assets of over £9,000 plus equipment worth some £12,000). Ten people posted adverts on our Harvestline noticeboard, seeking takers for about 15 tons of surplus apples.

Orchard Link is a not-for-profit company run by its members – a great team of unpaid directors and volunteers keep the wheels turning. As always, huge thanks to all of them.

Robin Toogood



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News from the nurseries



We are blessed with having good specialist nurseries in the area giving us access to hundreds of fruit tree varieties, including very local and rare ones. It wasn't always like that: back in the 1980s and 1990s it was hard to source Devon apple varieties. The South Hams Orchard Campaign (the precursor to Orchard Link) filled the gap by setting up a small experimental tree

nursery in the lower Dart valley to start propagating cuttings taken from local heritage orchards. A number of commercial nurseries subsequently saw the opportunity and took up the challenge on a much bigger scale. Things were looking up!

However, over the last few years there has been another sweeping wave of change in the fruit tree nursery sector. Three important and well-established nurseries permanently closed: Thornhayes Nursery near Cullompton, Perrie Hale Forest Nursery at Honiton, and – just this year – Endsleigh Gardens Nursery at Milton Abbot. Others have changed hands and relocated: Cider Apple Trees was taken over by the Whittick family in 2018 and is now operating from Sparkford in Somerset; Adams Apples near Cullompton was taken over by Tom Nancarrow; and The Mother Tree Nursery at Schumacher College was taken over by Richard Lewis in 2020 and is in the process of relocating in the Dartington area. Only the Agroforestry Research Trust nursery at Dartington, under Martin Crawford, has continued on a steady course throughout.

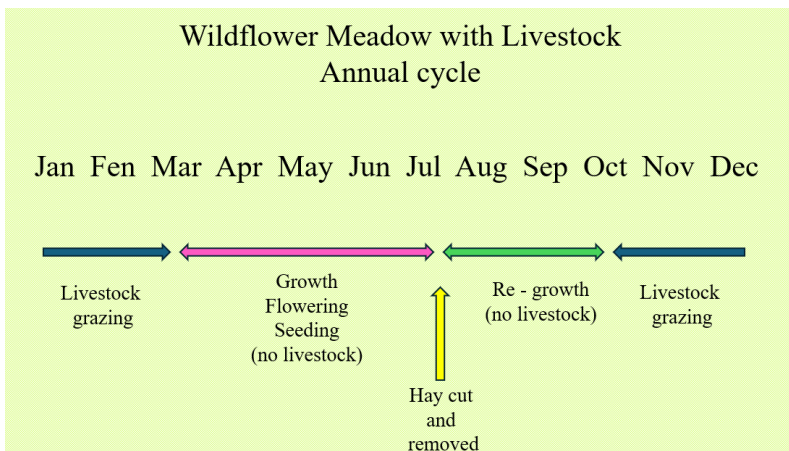
It's clearly tough out there: ever-rising costs of production, tighter household budgets, even the impacts of Brexit, create a very challenging trading environment for nurseries. These wonderful businesses need our custom and support! They offer a great range of fruits and varieties, a choice of rootstocks, and – importantly – expert advice. And by the way, if you are thinking of purchasing, it's always a good idea to order early in the planting season (that is, now!) while there is still plenty of choice.

Robin Toogood

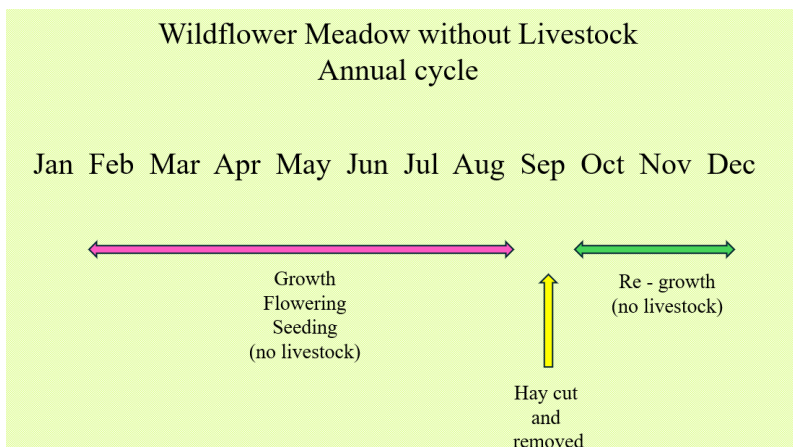
Long Easton: three ways of managing 'meadow'

One evening in June a number of us gathered in a field near Bigbury to view and discuss three different orchard floor management systems. In 2019 Henry and Louise Wainwright bought three fields above their house in the Avon valley. These fields had never been artificially fertilised and were already relatively biodiverse in terms of plant species. The plan was to generally enhance the 'wildflower meadow' attributes alongside establishing an orchard in one of the fields. Practicalities – for example, whether or not there was cattle-proof fencing and whether an area was accessible for mowing – led to three distinct approaches:

(1)



(2)



(3) No cutting or livestock

As we walked round Henry pointed out – and quizzed us on! – the different grasses. These often receive less attention than flowering plants but are important in their own right as food for the caterpillars of a number of butterfly species, as well as certain beetles and other invertebrates. In addition, they make a vital contribution to carbon sequestration and general soil health. However, the flower species remain a very significant element of the diversity mix, with nectar that attracts pollinating insects, leaves for larval food and a whole tranche of sometimes highly specific relationships. For this reason, Henry was experimenting with the addition of yellow rattle – parasitic on grass – in an area along the drive where he wished to reduce grass vigour.



Flower species in the ‘sunny and open’ meadows at Long Easton, managed according to systems (1) and (2), have been monitored – see list below* – so it was interesting to see what was happening in a smaller, more north-facing area near the house, which is relatively inaccessible and where there is no mowing at all (3). It was immediately

obvious that plant diversity was reducing under this regime, with shyer species out-competed by more vigorous ones (cocksfoot, *Dactylis glomerata*) and the layer of decayed plant material – ‘thatch’ – interfering with seedling emergence. However, this sort of cover is useful for small mammals and is thus part of the habitat range that is evolving at Easton.

Henry and Louise have also created a very fine garden, which includes rubble banks made from waste material resulting from building work. These are in the process of becoming a rich collection of mini-habitats for mining bees, beetles and reptiles as well as a place where low-nutrient plant species will thrive and spread – yet more wildlife value.

Our party made its way to the house, where our generous hosts had laid on a fine array of refreshments. The visit had showed us all how, while there may be shared underlying principles, there is no single approach to enhancing biodiversity. You have to consider the nature of your site, what you need it

to do, your resources, and what is sustainable. But we left pretty impressed by Wainwright energy!

Gill Gairdner

* Oxeye daisy, selfheal, red and white clover, knapweed, celandine, toadflax, red campion, mint, mouse-ear chickweed, cut-leaved cranesbill, little robin, ribwort plantain, common, sorrel, dock, germander speedwell, common bird's-foot trefoil and lesser trefoil, common cat's-ear, dandelion (and numerous other Compositae), St John's-wort, marjoram, ragwort, hogweed, wild carrot, vetches, thistle (numerous spp.), nettle.



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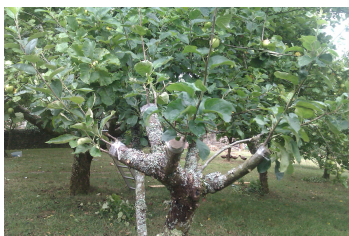
Top grafting (though beware – it may be addictive)

Top working (or top grafting) is a fun and not too challenging way of either creating a multi-variety tree or changing the fruit on a tree that has apples you don't care for. It can be done on a youngish tree or a much older one; it's not a means of creating a new tree from scratch. The significant root system of established trees means that the graft material from your preferred variety – the scion – develops rapidly and can come into fruit in a couple of years. It can make much more sense than replacing an unwanted tree with a new one.



The scions – wood of pencil-thickness taken from the previous year’s growth – are removed from the desired host tree in February and kept dormant in a fridge/cold shed. The grafting is done around April time as a rule, when the sap is rising and trees are well into bud and starting to sprout. The photo on the left shows a scion that’s just been inserted

behind the outer bark of a severed branch – it’s all about aligning the cambium layers, that is, the actively growing parts.



I won’t go into the actual process of making the graft here – come on next year’s course and learn by doing! But the photo here shows how a fully top-worked tree appears after a year. Note the vigorous extension of the scions. The photo below shows what a graft can look like when entirely ‘grown out’.



The success rate of top working is pretty high, which can lead you to get rather carried away ... I now have two trees with about seven varieties each! A rookie error is grafting a very vigorous scion onto a smaller, weaker tree. Look out! The new variety completely takes over.

Tattwa Gyani

‘What apple have I got?’ An update

At the moment there is uncertainty over whether the genetic testing scheme described in the 2023 newsletter is going to run next year. To check, go to <https://www.fruitid.com/#help>. You will find the Register of Local Cultivars (RLC), the details of any future scheme, and the outcomes of all the testing over the years 2016–2022. Hopefully, a decision will be made soon. Have a look on the site after the new year.

Meanwhile, to help with identifying an apple, the Nation Fruit Collection, at <https://www.nationalfruitcollection.org.uk/>, remains an invaluable resource.

Tattwa Gyani

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Favourite apple?

Well, there's really no such thing as a favourite apple, is there? But here's what some present and past committee members came up with:

Peter Webb



There are many fine dessert apples but the apple I really like is the cider apple **Browns**. A full sharp cider apple originally from Staverton, it's a true Devon cider apple and well adapted to our conditions.

From a grower's perspective it's a strong vigorous tree that is easy to manage. It doesn't need much encouragement to establish, nor a lot of mollycoddling, and the yield is remarkably steady and heavy. It's not prone to too many diseases or pests but can get unruly if not summer pruned and kept under control. Like Kingston Black it is capable of making a stand-alone cider. Delicious.

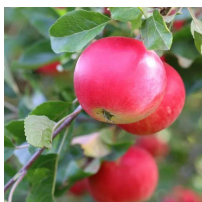
Charles Staniland

Ellison's Orange is a wonderful flavoured apple when at its best sometime in late September/early October. I remember greengrocers selling over-ripe apples which were 'fluffy' and slightly aniseed. A difficult apple to present for sale in peak condition, which is why we grow it to eat off the tree. A good crop can be utilised by mixing with Herring Pippin or (American) Mother to make a wonderful complex-tasting juice.



Tess Wilmot

I like **Discovery** because it's one the first apples of the season and children love it. It doesn't keep well and is at its best when just picked. My tree is wonderfully reliable – in 20 years I have only had one poor year. It grows really well in the West Country and the fruit is very attractive, especially when the red in the skin spreads through the flesh. I take baskets of Discovery with me to events to share and to encourage people to eat local apples: it has a powerful 'wow factor'.



Tattwa Gyani

When I moved into my South Molton house, there was a tree which every year produced a huge crop of tasty cooker/eaters that keep until February and bake beautifully. Attractive large clean fruit, and a healthy if slightly over-vigorous tree. I had to learn to graft to take it with me when I sold the house, as it is a 'pippin', hence unique in genetic fingerprint. It came from a seed planted by a guy called Bill Grant, who lived there before me. So that marked the beginning of my apple husbandry journey – thank you, **Bill Grant's Pippin!**

Gill Gairdner

My favourite apple is a cooker called **Dumelow's Seedling** (or Wellington). It goes back to the early nineteenth century and has endured because it has a fine acid flavour, crops reliably, keeps till March, has good disease resistance and – the clincher for me – spurs freely, so, unlike vigorous, tip-bearing Bramley, *it's very easy to manage*. (I used to look after a large commercial Bramley orchard, which left me rabidly allergic to all tip-bearers)



Henry Wainwright

Picking a favourite apple is like choosing a single record to take to your desert island: it depends on the moment. My choice today is **Falstaff**. Pretty idiot-proof to grow, with regular cropping and good disease resistance: no temperamental problem child for me. It hangs well on the tree so harvest date is not critical. When it comes to the eating it is crisp, juicy and consistent. Though lacking the aromatic flavour of some, Falstaff is that ever-dependable friend in the orchard.



Robin Toogood

To my mind, **Kidd's Orange Red** is the perfect eater. It looks fantastic, just what a classic apple should be. The taste is bright, crisp, juicy and sweet (but not too sweet). It ripens late and stores well. And it's had an interesting journey round the world, having been bred in New Zealand in the 1920s from an English Cox Orange Pippin x American Delicious cross, then brought back over here.



Sue Hallam

Adam's Pearmain, a dessert apple that ripens fairly late in the season. I like its distinctive 'peary' shape and, to me, it even has a slight taste – or maybe texture – of a not-quite-ripe pear. It's quite a firm, crisp apple, with an attractive reddish/orange colour and a nice, fairly sharp taste. I only have one Adam's Pearmain tree and its apples get eaten quite quickly, so I haven't tested how long they keep, but the suppliers say they last until March. Touch wood, it hasn't shown any sign of disease so far.



Tim Walker

My favourite apple would be **Tremlett's Bitter**. This is a Devon cider variety, an early bittersweet with a full tannin flavour that makes a good single variety cider or is a good addition to a cider blend. Flowering is early and it needs a good pollinator. The bush trees are difficult to maintain a good habit with a strong central leader and need careful pruning. The tree can produce heavy crops but becomes biennial and can be disease susceptible.





Secateurs

You only have to search the internet for secateurs to find that the choice is bewildering. Antique, right and left-handed, blade and handle shape, and colour to name just a few of the variables. However, there are only three basic cutting mechanisms and as the winter pruning season is upon us it seems timely to consider these.



Bypass secateurs have two blades and cut like a pair of scissors. One blade is sharpened on the outside edge and crosses over the thicker metal platform. The blades are pointed and usually curved and cope easily with stems of 15 mm in diameter. As the cutting action creates a clean cut, they are suitable for green softer tissue.

Anvil secateurs have a single blade that cuts through a stem against a block or anvil in a similar action to a knife on a chopping board. The blade is sharpened on both sides and in general can be used on thicker, woodier stems than the bypass secateurs. If the blade is blunt or the stem tissue is soft then there is a tendency to crush the stem rather than cut it cleanly. Anvil secateurs tend to be the least expensive type.



Double-bladed secateurs are less common in Britain but popular on the continent for use by professionals pruning fruit, vine and olive trees. They have two cutting blades that meet together, each sharpened on just one side. Probably the most expensive type of secateur.

All secateurs are relatively easy to take apart and repair, and replacement parts should generally be available.

Henry Wainwright



Apple scab

Apple scab (which also infects pears) is a fungal disease that is most often seen on leaves and fruit but may also appear on other parts of the tree. It appears as lesions (infected areas) with a definite outline as olive-green or brown circular spots; in severe infection, fruit cracking can occur. Severe leaf infection can result in early leaf drop.



The apple scab fungus (*Venturia inaequalis*) overwinters on infected leaves that have fallen to the ground. In spring, around flowering time, ascospores are released from the overwintering sites to infect shoots, leaves and fruitlets. For the spore to germinate the tissue must be continuously wet for some hours (depending on the temperature), and after germination the fungus penetrates the plant tissue and infection becomes visible in two to

three weeks. Wet conditions favour scab, so scab is much more prevalent in wet summers, while dry seasons will see much lower levels.

Simple sanitation measures that reduce the overwintering sites of the fungus – such as raking up and removing fallen leaves – help limit the occurrence. Also, spraying with a 5% urea solution can help by speeding up leaf breakdown. Commercial growers use fungicides alongside sophisticated computer-based models measuring leaf wetness and temperature data to predict when scab infection is likely to occur in order to limit their spraying regime. However, growing resistant varieties is probably the best approach, and certainly scab resistance is an important priority for breeders. Eaters such as Ashmead's Kernel, Discovery, Egremont Russet and Greensleeves and cookers such as Lord Derby and Grenadier all have reasonable scab resistance. (Unfortunately, Cox's Orange Pippin and Bramley are both susceptible.)

Henry Wainwright

Orchard mapping

Mapping your orchard helps tremendously with recording what you have as well as any changes, and is something that can be passed on when the orchard changes hands. With smart phones at the ready, nine orchardists gathered in Week parish hall to explore the options of how to map an orchard. The course was led by Robin Toogood, who took us through a very practical review of the approaches we could all use with minimal prior knowledge or specialist equipment bar a smart phone – though he began by stressing the importance, when planting a new orchard, of clearly labelling the trees on the ground, and some examples of different labels were shown and their relative merits described.



When making a map, using Google Maps in satellite view to plot the trees can be a big help, but in a close-packed orchard that has large and closed canopies and a lot of shade in the aerial view, distinguishing individual trees – particularly recently planted ones – can be difficult. Robin described how his own orchard had this problem, which calls for a low-tech plotting method. His approach was to set out a reference line on the ground and

measure the trees' distance from this line at right angles to the left and right, then transferring the coordinates on to graph paper. A very practical solution, though challenging if the ground will not allow a reference line to be positioned in the orchard.

The two satellite technologies – What3Words (<https://what3words.com/>) and GPS positioning on Google Maps – were explained. Where the individual trees are visible on Google Maps, the whole process of obtaining a tree's coordinates can be completed from a desk PC. Where the position of the trees is not visible, you need to take a smart phone to the orchard and stand by each tree to find the GPS coordinates or What3Words to describe the exact location – though this does rely on having a good phone signal.

Once the coordinates of the individual trees are obtained, you can then create your own map on your computer. There are many apps and programmes available, but the 'Google My Maps' program

(<https://www.google.co.uk/maps/about/mymaps/>) was recommended as being easy to use and one that enables photos and any other individual tree information to be added. The map can also be shared with others.

The training afternoon ended with the participants practising locating trees using their smart phones in the Week community orchard.

Henry Wainwright and Robin Toogood



The image is a promotional graphic for Vigo Ltd. At the top, the word "vigo" is written in a large, white, lowercase serif font, with "est 1984" in a smaller font below it. Below the logo, the text "Equipping the Nation's Drink Producers" is written in a white sans-serif font. Underneath this, there are five icons: a blue water drop, three yellow circles of different sizes, a purple bottle, a yellow bucket, and two grey gears with a small Union Jack flag above them. Below the icons, the text "Cider & juice processing & packaging equipment" is written in a white sans-serif font. A horizontal bar with a blue-to-yellow gradient separates this from the next section. Below the bar, the words "EQUIPMENT SERVICE SUPPORT" are written in a white sans-serif font. Underneath, the text "Renowned brands plus our Engineering Team for servicing & maintenance" is written in a white sans-serif font. Below this, there are logos for KREYER, voran, and BARID. At the bottom, the text "Call us on 01404 892 100 or email sales@vigoltd.com" is written in a white sans-serif font. Below this, there are social media icons for Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn, followed by the text "vigoltd.com", "Dunkeswell, Devon, EX14 4LF", and "@VigoLtd".

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Courses and events

Saturday, 18 January. Winter Pruning of Apples & Pears, with Charles Staniland. A course for beginners and those wishing to revisit their pruning skills. Details TBA.

Saturday, 1 February. Restorative Pruning of Mature or Neglected Trees. Daignton, nr. Newton Abbot. Details TBA.

Saturday, 15 February. Bench Grafting. Learn to graft your own trees – a fun and inexpensive way to grow the varieties of apple you want. Rootstocks will be provided. Dartington. Details TBA.

Early March. Winter Pruning. This is an opportunity to practise your pruning skills on an orchard scale, learning how to prune most efficiently in order to promote the trees' fruiting potential. Christow, in the Teign valley. Details TBA.

Saturday, 5 April. Top Grafting. This simple technique will enable you to add another variety of apple to an existing tree or entirely replace it. Details TBA.

For more information about these events and/or to book, go to the 'Events and courses' page of the Orchard Link website.



ORCHARDS LIVE

Saturday, 11 January, 10.30–3.30. Restorative Pruning. Halberton. £16.

Saturday, 13 January, 10.30–3.30. Restorative Pruning. Nr. Bishops Tawton. £16.00.

Saturday, 8 February. Devon Scion Day. Lapford Victory Hall. Free.

Saturday, 8 February, 1.30–4.00. Bench Grafting. Lapford Victory Hall. £8.

Sunday, 9 March, 10.30–4.00. Planning & Planting a New Orchard. Nr. Chumleigh. £16.

To find out more and/or to book, visit the 'Events/Courses' page of the Orchards Live website (www.orchardslive.org.uk).

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