

Spring 2004
Volume 1.22



ORCHARD LINK *NEWS*

WE'RE ON THE WEB!

At last we have our own web site. Following our request for help in the winter newsletter, member and web designer Barry Isaac who runs Western Web, set up a series of colourful web pages for Orchard Link, at a budget price.

Take a look for yourself at www.orchardlink.co.uk. As you'll see, the site not only provides information on our organisation, but has a 'news' page, so that we can keep you up to date with the latest goings on- rather than waiting to include them in the next newsletter. Last Autumn several pressing days and other events were arranged by members at short notice, so to keep you informed of events, courses and social events we will be E mailing members as new events occur. Please let us have an E mail address if you have one so that we can add it to our list. Promise we won't pass it on to anybody else and shall only make contact every few weeks. We hope that the new web site will provide a great shop window for Orchard Link and will shortly be linked to the sites of some of our local and national partner organisations too. Take a look and tell us what you think and pass our web address on. We're waiting to hear from you!

IN THIS ISSUE;

- ❖ Come to our Annual Gathering.
- ❖ Choose the right apple tree for your site- expert advice.
- ❖ What's On? Courses, events and much more.



Charles Staniland leads another successful pruning course in the Tamar valley, see article inside.

ANNUAL GATHERING 2004.

Sunday 13th June.

This year's Annual Gathering offers the chance to see beautiful old orchards and a garden, being restored with volunteer help, also to meet Steve Bradley of Heron Valley Cider- and find out how he produces excellent cider plus a range of apple juices.

It will be held at Hazelwood House near Loddiswell, deep in the wooded Avon valley, South Hams.

As ever there will be plenty of opportunities to network with other Orchard Link members and orchard experts, to enjoy a hot soup lunch, taste local cider and juice and enjoy a day all about orchards. If you made any cider last year- don't forget to bring some along and perhaps win a basket of Westcountry cheeses in our competition, kindly sponsored by David Halpin.

And to attend this very special occasion - all you have to do is to join or renew your membership for 2004. All current members will receive two tickets absolutely free.

WHICH APPLE TREE SHALL I PLANT?

Choosing which apple tree to plant can be a daunting process for the un-initiated. There are so many things to consider – rootstock, variety, flowering time for pollination, cookers, eaters, cider apples, keeping apples or earlies, taste etc., etc.,

So I thought it was time for a mini- series of articles attempting to demystify the process. We start today with a look at all the different considerations; this will be followed up with a look at some of the different categories of apple and some good varieties for growing in the South –West of England.

Firstly let's look at rootstocks. Apple trees are grafted onto a rootstock. The most important characteristic of the rootstock is that it controls the eventual size of the tree. So a Cox's Orange Pippin grafted onto a dwarfing rootstock might only grow 4feet tall, whereas grafted onto an M25 rootstock it could grow to 30 feet tall. The rootstock also has a bearing on other factors such as disease resistance or suitability for different soil types. In the past apple trees were grown on crab apple stocks known as seedling stocks giving large trees. Nowadays the process has become much more scientific, with the rootstocks having code names such as MM106 or EMLA 9.

The rootstocks you are mostly likely to come across are shown in the table below :

You are unlikely to find many West country apples on dwarfing rootstocks. MM 106 and M 25 are the most common rootstocks at local nurseries. If you are planting out in the open, you can choose whichever size of tree you prefer, although M25 trees are most at home in the Devon landscape. They are the size of tree used for centuries in farm orchards. If you are planting trees in a garden, you will need to be much more conscious of the eventual size of the tree in relation to your garden. M25 trees should be planted around 10 yds apart, whereas MM106 trees can be planted at half that distance.

ROOTSTOCK	% FULL SIZE	OTHER CHARACTERISTICS
M9	25	Not good for light, dry, or sandy soils. Requires permanent staking. Increased susceptibility to canker. Bears young. Can be picked from the ground.
M26	40	Not good for wet or clay soils. Semi-permanent staking. Bears young. Can be picked from the ground.
MM106	65	Semi-dwarfing. Not suitable for very wet soils because of susc. to phytophthora. Stake 5 years.
MM111	75	A useful rootstock not found very often.
M25	90	The standard rootstock for large trees. Does not staking unless very exposed.

Pollination is another subject which can be demystified with a few simple guidelines. On the whole, apple trees are not self-pollinating. In other words you need to plant a second tree of a different variety to help pollinate the first one. For this to be effective, the two trees need to be in flower at the same time, so that bees can transfer pollen from one tree to the other. For this reason, you will see flowering times given next to a variety of apple tree. The simplest description uses numbers from 1 (earliest) to 7 (latest) to describe the flowering time. To cross-pollinate, a tree would need to be in the same group or overlapping by one. So a variety in group 3 would be pollinated by one in groups 2, 3, or 4. If you plant 10 or more varieties you can usually assume that pollination will be OK, unless you are planting varieties at either extreme of the flowering time.

This is all reasonably simple until we come to triploids. A triploid is a variety that doesn't produce viable pollen of it's own. This means that it is not a useful pollinator of other trees and needs two other varieties to pollinate it, also flowering at the same time. Bramley's Seedling is an example of a triploid.

We are lucky that in most parts of the South –West we don't get many late frosts. Frosts at blossom time can decimate crops, so if you do live in a frost pocket it can be helpful to plant later flowering varieties, so that they are flowering when there is less chance of frost.

I'm running out of space, and the Sunday lunch needs cooking, so I'd better stop here. Next issue we'll look at the influence of disease in choosing which varieties to grow, and also at the different types of apple and their season of use.

Ben Pike, Devon Orchard Services.



Harvesting

DOWN YOUR WAY

A series of tales from members' orchards- this time Ben Pike talks about his work in orchards ancient and new.

Of the many orchards I have worked in this winter, two in particular stand out. The first stands at the side of a grand Victorian house on the slopes of Dartmoor overlooking Ashburton. Known as the Druid orchard, it is particularly interesting because a planting plan dating from 1884 came to light a few years ago. This plan contains the names of a number of apple varieties that may now be extinct such as Queen Anne and The Fool's Apple. Unfortunately about half the trees have died, and the plan is rather vague, so it is difficult to tell which tree is which. Graftwood has been taken from the old trees, and the subsequent young trees have been planted in community orchards in Totnes and Dartmouth, ensuring the continuation of the variety should the old tree die. Further detective work is needed to identify the old trees; anyone interested in this fascinating work please contact me.

Last winter the old trees received their first prune for decades. They are decidedly old and dodderly; caring for them is a little like running an old people's home. This winter 90 new trees have been planted. Half were chosen to replicate the old varieties that are still being sold, including Yellow Ingestrie and Lane's Prince Albert. The remaining apples were chosen for their use as juicing apples, including Falstaff and the Gloucestershire varieties Frederick and Severn Bank. These were supplemented by plums, cherries, cobnuts and almonds, pears, quince and mulberries. The work was extensive as large guards had to be built to protect the trees from deer.

The other orchard of note was at completely the other end of the spectrum. Dick Ensor, a man not in the first flush of youth, has taken the bold step of planting a commercial organic orchard. I call this bold because our climate is so damp that the fungal diseases canker and scab make the production of first quality apples a difficult task in this area.

Dick took on the tasks of taking soil samples, improving the poor soil ploughing, harrowing and planting green manure. I was called in to advise on the choice of varieties and cultivation methods. Once I had selected the varieties, Dick

started phoning nurseries to try and obtain the trees. Apart from having trouble finding the varieties he wanted, he was bombarded with advice on growing organic apples. The only trouble was that all the advice was different. Most nurseries seemed to have a grasp of the importance of scab resistance, but few nurseries in the drier parts of England seemed to realise how debilitating canker can be in this part of the world. Finally the trees were ordered and they began to arrive in the second half of February. The trees have just been planted in neat and tidy rows, and we await future developments with great interest.

Varieties chosen were Red Falstaff, Red Devil and Bramley's Seedling for juicing, Rosemary Russet, Woolbrook Pippin, Ashmead's Kernel and Adam's Pearmain for dessert, and Belle de Boskoop, Woolbrook Russet, Golden Noble and Lord Derby as cookers. Dick is also trialling some Czech varieties recommended by Keeper's Nursery in Kent as well as Park Farm Pippin and Catillac, a long-keeping cooking pear.

For your information, Keeper's Nursery has a very informative website, while Adam's Apples provided the cheapest trees, and Thornhayes Nursery supplied the best quality trees, though also the most expensive. Scott's Nursery had the best availability of trees on various rootstocks, though the quality of the trees rather disappointing.

We shall keep you informed on progress of the orchard. Meanwhile we would love you to write about your orchard. It doesn't need to be big or famous; we are just as keen to hear your personal experiences and why you enjoy growing fruit trees.

THANK YOU.

A big thank you to all those who have contributed to this newsletter and especially to Wendy Stayte, who has offered to help organise more social events. You can meet Wendy at the Annual Gathering, where she will be showing us just some of the work which she has achieved to restore historic gardens and the estate of Hazelwood House with the help of volunteers.

TAMAR PRUNING COURSE HELPS CONSERVE VALLEY'S ORCHARDS.

Amongst other industries, the Tamar Valley has a strong tradition of market gardening. In its heyday, the Valley was covered with orchards and plots growing daffodils, strawberries and cherries. Today, although a fraction of its former size, the industry lives on. In order to raise awareness of the AONB in general and the various projects the Service are involved with, a programme of events is produced each year. In an attempt to encourage owners to plant and care for orchards to ensure survival in the Tamar Valley, the Service held an Orchard Pruning Workshop on 12th February, at Botus Fleming and Callington. Led by Charles Staniland, who has 30 years experience in pruning and has his own orchard business in the South Hams, 12 people turned up to learn more about pruning and acquire skills. Following a brief theory session where Charles discussed with the group why they should prune, how to prune, tools to use and safety, there were opportunities for practical work. The orchard in Botus Fleming included over 100 trees of different ages and varieties where trainees had the chance to assess the pruning requirements of the trees, then put the theories into practice.

Those who attended the workshop were keen to know whether other workshops would be set up in the future and felt that the day had provided a really good opportunity to understand a complex subject in a straightforward way.

CARING FOR THE TAMAR VALLEY AONB.

The Tamar Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is located on the border of Cornwall and Devon, and encompasses the valleys of the Tamar, Tavy and Lynher.

The area, which covers 75 square miles (195 square kilometres), was designated an AONB in 1995. The purpose of such designation is to conserve and enhance the

landscape, whilst recognising the needs of people who live in, work in and visit the area.

If you are interested in learning more about the Tamar Valley AONB or would like to receive our events programme (due out in May 2003) please do get in touch.

Alternatively, please visit www.tamarvalley.org.uk for further details about our area. The next pruning day should be held sometime in July 2004.

Contact: Charlotte Maunder, Information & Communications Officer.

Tel: 01822 610679, E-mail: cmaunder@tamarvalley.org.uk

BREATHING LIFE INTO LANDSCAPES.

In Winter Orchard Link News, we reported on a new landscape grant scheme for the South Devon AONB. Offering payments for managing and conserving a wide range of habitats and landscapes from flower-rich meadows to green lanes to wetlands, it includes work to restore and replant traditional orchards. With up to £2000 per holding available, the scheme should help many South Hams landowners to undertake real management work to restore and conserve countryside features which make up the areas distinctive landscape. Grants are available for a three year period and although they have to be match funded- if landowners undertake the practical work themselves this can be counted in terms of labour as well as cash.

The scheme, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund is to be launched under the name 'Life Into Landscape' on May 14th at Hazelwood House, when guided tours of the grounds and nearby Blackdown Rings ancient monument will demonstrate the range of sites eligible. Tickets to the event (which includes a buffet lunch,) are free, but need to be booked in advance.

If you have land in the South Devon AONB and would like one or to know more about the scheme or would like a ticket to the launch day, contact David Leach, Devon Wildlife Trust, Shirehampton House, St. David's Hill, Exeter. EX4 4DA. Tel. 01392 279244.

BLACKAWTON'S NEW COMMUNITY ORCHARD.

Local resident Marie Circuit tells us about plans for a community orchard next to newly established allotments in her South Hams village.

Spurred on by the success and completion of our first year since setting up an allotment scheme in Blackawton on part of a field owned by the Playing Fields Association, we began looking over the fence to the green grass on the adjacent 1.5 acre field and dreamed of planting a community orchard with meadows; picnic areas; grazing; compost toilet; community composting - in all a project to compliment and complete the existing village hall, tennis court and allotments complex to benefit both the environment and the whole community.

This site is beautiful, on a south facing slope with open, clear and stunningly peaceful views over the fields and woods beyond - a space which needs sharing. Tenders were invited in January for the annual grazing and our group took the plunge, having established that a further grant from BTCV would be likely, and made a non cash value bid for the field.

There was a bit of opposition from some locals who doubtless felt nervous and threatened by this 'invasion', but our tender was accepted with some reasonable conditions, i.e. a five year initial contract and no planting for the first year (in case this flush of enthusiasm waned!).

Next step is a site meeting with a few 'experts' to give us some advice and guidance, then perhaps some site visits to other community orchards while submitting our next grant application. So far we have the verbal commitment of 12 enthusiasts in the village who would like to be involved - we'll need

to order the trees and look forward to a 'planting' event at the beginning of next year. Watch this space for the next instalment - we are so excited, we are obsessed

HAVE A GO AT FARMING!

Christian Taylor reports on a new initiative in South Devon.

South Devon Community Supported Farming (S.Devon CSF) is a voluntary not-for profit group, constituted in Spring 2003, which on October 18th 2003 celebrated its first shared harvest of potatoes and leeks at Velwell Orchard near the Dartington Steiner School. During its first year, S.Devon CSF piloted two organic varieties of potato on three sites between Totnes and the coast.

The aims of S. Devon CSF are to set up a Neighbourhood Farm Network (NFN) of land, farm, garden, allotment and school projects that mutually support each other in a co-operative way to provide a pool of labour, seeds, tools, equipment and knowledge for vegetable and fruit production. The goal is to increase the local production of fruit and vegetables using organic, biodynamic and permaculture principles. The idea is that the project is site-specific, working with conventional farmers to introduce them to experimental plots of fruit and vegetables as well as working with growers who are already certified as biodynamic.

One objective of S.Devon CSF is for healthy foods to become cheaper so that more low-income families and disadvantaged groups have opportunities to lead healthy lifestyles and gain access to local food produced using organic principles. Other objectives are to increase the abundance and diversity of local seasonal fruit and vegetable varieties in S.Devon, and for each site in the Neighbourhood Farm Network to become a viable business in it's own right.

Why not come along, join in and see CSF in action for yourself? Workdays are held at Velwell Orchard on the first Saturday of each month.

There will also be an AGM with refreshments on **13th April at The Guildhall, Totnes 6.45-9pm.**

In October, Orchard Link will be working with the group to hold a community pressing day in Totnes, and we'd welcome helpers or people with apples to press. For further details, contact; S.Devon CSF, Guildhall Offices, 5 Ramparts Walk, Totnes, TQ95QH, or ring Christian on (01803) 868648 or e.mail christian@sdcsf.fsllife.co.uk.

WHAT'S ON?

Contacts for events;

'Orchards Live'- Jane Schofield,
Lewdown Farm, Black Dog, Crediton,
Devon. EX17 4QQ.

Hazelwood Land Project. Wendy
Stayte. Tel 01803 868305.

**Charles Staniland. (Orchard Link
pruning courses)** Tel. 01364 653169.

Coast and Countryside Events.
Tel 01803 861384.

Orchard Link events- see address and
no. on back page.

March.

Friday 26th Pomona Meeting.

Orchards Live are inviting a number of
people in Devon to explore the
possibility of researching and
producing a Pomona of Devon
apples. All interested are welcome to
attend. 12.30pm- 3pm at Stoke Canon
village hall, near Exeter. Call Michael
Gee for more details on 01271 374180.

**Saturday 27th 'So you want to plant
an orchard?'** How to plan and plant a
new orchard- at South Cobbaton Farm,
Chittlehampton, N. Devon. 12.30-3pm.
£10. Call Orchards Live to book.

April.

Sunday 4th Help at Hazelwood.

Come and help plant and tend the
historic garden at Hazelwood House,
near Loddiswell. Families very
welcome- there's a free lunch for all
who come, but booking essential. Call
Wendy Stayte on 01803 868305.

May

**Mayday Monday 3rd. 'Champagne,
cider orchards and a curious cat'** A
short guided walk around Stoke
Gabriel on the Dart which will take in
the villages community orchard and
visit OL member Steve Mittler's
orchard where we hope to taste his first
cider 'champagne'! Meet at 10.15 by
the Quayhole Café, Mill pool, Stoke
Gabriel. Adults £3, children £1- a
Coast and Countryside event. Why not

bring a picnic to eat in the orchard and
stay for the village' traditional May
fair which will be held there at 2pm?

**Friday 14th - Launch of the 'Life into
Landscape' scheme** at Hazelwood
House. See article in this newsletter for
full details. Orchard Link will be there
and Ben Pike will help to lead a walk
around the restored orchard.

June.

Saturday 12th 'Bats, Birds, Green Lanes and Cider' Guided walk

around the National Trust coastline at
Woodhuish between Kingswear and
Brixham. Along the way a chance to
see a fine old cider press which the
Trust hope to restore and to make cider
on (watch Orchard Link News for
details!) Meet at Mansands car park
(map ref; SX 913 530) at 2pm. Return
around 4.30pm. Adults £3, children £1,
NT members free. A Coast and
Countryside Event.

**Sunday 13th Orchard Link's Annual
Gathering-** don't miss this enjoyable,
informative event! See front page for
details. There are 2 places **free** for
each current OL member, a limited
number of additional places will be
available at £8 per ticket. Contact
Orchard Link for details.

July.

Sunday 18th - learn to Summer

Prune. Led by Charles Staniland for
Orchard Link. An excellent hands-on
Course to be held in the Totnes area.
£12, OL members £10. Call Charles
for details and to book.



THE BIG APPLE IN MUCH MARCLE

If you fancy a weekend break and the chance to enjoy visiting some orchards further afield, why not try a trip to Herefordshire's Much Marcle area? Orchard Link member Jackie Sarsby reports.

Herefordshire, like Devon, is famous for its orchards and its cider, and for 15 years now, the communities around Much Marcle near Ledbury have put together their own 'seasonal celebration of English apples and cider'. This year, the 'Big Apple', as they call the weekend, takes place on 9th and 10th October, and there will be lots of small rural events including cider-making, local apple identification, fruit tree care, orchard conservation, cookery, orchard walks, talks, creative crafts and apple teas. It is a wonderfully friendly weekend when you can learn about Herefordshire cider-making which is not quite the same as ours: for instance, they used mats made of horses hair, rather than oaten straw, traditionally, to build the mockor cheese), and see a display of an amazing number of varieties of local apples, culinary, dessert and cider and perry pears.

They usually have the display in the Village Hall at Much Marcle along with the exceptionally good teas. Any or all the events provide an opportunity to meet other people who are mad about orchards, or who make apple juice, or cider, or apple-pies, or who keep pigs or sheep among their apple trees, or are interested in the history of their landscape and farming. In the Spring, they also have a 'Blossom time in Putley' event at Putley on the Marcle Ridge, with a grand cider- and perry-tasting in Putley Village Hall, and orchards and cider-makers to visit. This will be held on 2nd and 3rd May 2004. For a detailed programme of the 'Big Apple' events, or for more about 'Blossom time in Putley', 'phone Mrs. Jackie Denman on 01531 670544, or send a SAE to 'Big Apple', Woodcroft, Putley, Ledbury, Herefordshire, HR8 2RD. For details of accommodation in the area, 'phone Ledbury Tourist info Centre on 01531 636147.



Leominster Morris men at the Much Marcle apple celebrations. Photo; Jackie Sarsby.

GOOD HOME NEEDED- WITH PAID JOB!

For Orchard Link's presses, mills and a trailer. Although we have been lucky to have had indoor storage in a barn at Harberton, the property has changed hands recently, so we are looking for a lockable, dry storage area. Last season Ben Pike not only handled all calls on the Orchard Link phone line, as he lived close by, he hired out the presses too. Thank you for doing such a wonderful job, Ben!

This year, Ben will still take all orchard enquiries, including those re selling fruit to juice and cider makers, we do need someone to undertake the hiring out of the presses, however. As Ben found, this is easiest if the kit is close by your home. So anyone out there with an easy to access barn, who would like free use of the presses a small 'rent' and payment by the hour during the Autumn for seeing the equipment in and out, please call Ben Pike on the Orchard Link number below.

Contact Orchard Link at-
ORCHARD LINK, PO BOX 109, TOTNES.
TQ9 5XR. Or call- 07792 664710.

Don't forget to visit our new web site at
www.orchardlink.org.uk.

You can E mail us there or at
benpike@talk21.com or
trudy.turrell@southhams.gov.uk.