



ORCHARD LINK *NEWS*

WINNING THE ORCHARD WILDLIFE WAR

Although I thought that by now everyone was well aware of the value of traditional old orchards in the landscape and the need to conserve them, commercial fruit growers are even now calling for grants towards the grubbing up of older orchards – this is in addition to the grants which already exist to encourage the grubbing up of orchards of less than 20 years old.

This comes at a time when the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds is voicing its support for traditional orchards, due to the wildlife which they support. Studies have recently shown that traditional orchards support twice as many birds of a greater species diversity, compared to modern ones. In addition a rich variety of insects can be found on older apple trees – the rare metallic green chafer beetle actually breeds on the decaying wood of old apple trees.

Another thought for those of you who delight in the wildlife which your orchard supports, is that over the last century, when almost every acre of agricultural land has been assaulted with sprays of pesticides, herbicides, fertilisers and the deadly DDT, old orchards alone have been left untouched. As the trees prevented the use of -tractors and spraying machines and few orchards were sprayed as intensively cultivated crops were, the old apple trees now shelter an oasis of permanent 'untouched' meadow – a time capsule of countryside from before the pesticide revolution. Grub these out and you are destroying a precious habitat.

What a shame we don't all value old orchards for the rare and precious jewels they are in our countryside.

INSIDE:

- * Choose and make the right stock guards for your orchard
- * Learn to graft and prune
- * Early spring orcharding tips
- * Why Dartmouth orchard needs friends
- * Millennium orchards for everyone to enjoy



ORCHARDS FOR EVERYONE TO ENJOY

Even if you don't have a garden, if you live in Ashpington you can plant and watch your own Devon apple tree grow. For here, the parish has taken on a field and with the help of local people, planted a new orchard of old local varieties of apple trees for everyone to enjoy. Here, individuals or families 'sponsor' the purchase and care of an apple tree and now around 40 young trees make up what is a well loved and used open space. Their tree will later be recorded on a map showing all the varieties – and already the orchard is a bit of living history – some trees were planted to celebrate the birth of a baby or the memory of a loved one.

Although a new and trendy term 'community orchards' have been in existence for centuries in some villages. If you came to the Wassail in Stoke Gabriel in January you would have seen locals using and enjoying their old traditional riverside orchard which provides a place to walk, sit, contemplate the mill pool below – or for local school children to play in.

As the millennium approaches, several parishes in Devon are considering creating or adopting their own orchard for all the community to use and enjoy. More beautiful than just an open space, with the added benefits of apples for everyone to use – or to sell for a small income towards its upkeep, community orchards can be great local resources and can offer a solution to small patches of orchards within villages. Dare I say that most locals would prefer an orchard to infill development?!

For parish councils and other community groups there are various grants too to help finance and set up an orchard – plus of course there's advice from Orchard Link. So if you want to extend your interest in orchards beyond your own patch – take a look at your town or village and see whether your ideas could bear fruit for years to come.

If you live in the South Hams, contact the Coast and Countryside Service who should be able to help. Tel: (01803) 861140.

WHAT'S ON?

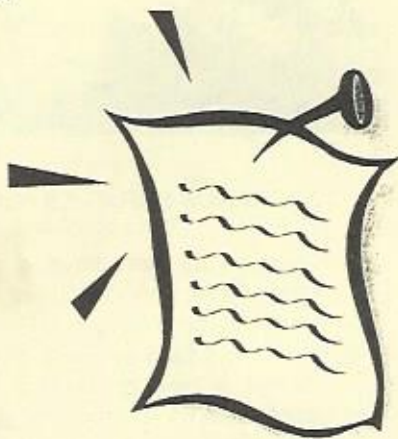
Diary Dates – for full details see below:

Saturday 20th February – Grafting Course
Staverton, near Totnes

Saturday 27th February – Grafting Course – Weare
Gifford, near Bideford

Saturday 6th March – Learn to Prune – Dartington,
near Totnes

Saturday 17th April – Orchard Issues Day –
Eggesford, mid Devon



HARD GRAFT

Expert nurseryman Kevin Croucher, who owns Thornhayes Nursery and specialises in growing hundreds of varieties of traditional and rare apple trees, will be offering expert tuition in the technique of grafting. Often seen as a very specialist skill, grafting is a technique which anyone can learn – and with a little practice you can propagate your own apple trees from a favourite old variety.

Kevin will be leading grafting day courses for the Coast and Countryside Service at Staverton and for Dartington North Devon Trust at Weare Gifford near Bideford. During each day he's also offering participants the chance to try grafting pears, cherries, plums and medlars as well as apples – perhaps you could bring some of your own favourite fruit wood (labelled please!) and swap with others.

As numbers are limited, booking is essential on both courses.

* For 20th February (10.30am–1pm) at Staverton call the Coast and Countryside Service – (01803) 861140. The price is £14 and includes graftwood and your own grafting knife worth £7.

* For 27th February (10am–3pm) call Dartington North Devon Trust (01271) 376365. The price is £6. Tea and coffee are provided but bring some money for lunch at the Cider Press Pub nearby. Bring a grafting knife if you own one.

LEARN TO PRUNE

The Coast and Countryside Service's course on Saturday 6th March is probably your last chance to learn to prune large mature apple trees this Spring! The day will be held at Dartington Primary School which is surrounded by beautiful old apple trees – so we'll be helping them to care for an 'orchard' which is enjoyed by the pupils and passing walkers and motorists too.

The day costs £15 and there's still a few places left. To book call (01803) 861140.

SHOGS

If you're looking for some exciting new ideas for the new year, then 'SHOGS' may be just what you're looking for. The South Hams Organic Gardeners Society has been set up as part of the Tresillian Garden Project in Kingsbridge. Anyone is welcome to join, its main purpose being to bring like-minded people together to share ideas, resources, fun and learning. The society is affiliated to HDRA and hopes to set up a book library, tool sharing scheme and environmental database to help anyone interested in changing to, starting off or continuing in organic growing. The packed spring programme includes the following:

February 20th – PLANTS FOR THE FUTURE a talk and visit by Ken Fern who has written a book on the subject (this will be followed by a visit to the Plants for the Future site, in Cornwall, in March).

March 6th WORKSHOP – making a HERB GARDEN. During March there will be an evening meeting in Totnes - Tom Hoblyn from South Hams Orchard Services will talk on Orchards and Orchard Link, date and venue to be confirmed.

April 3rd WORKSHOP – COMPANION PLANTING
April 20th start of 5 week evening course in ORGANIC GARDENING tutor Stephen Nutt.

April 21st start of 5 week daytime course GROW YOUR OWN FOOD tutor Jill Davies

April 21st PLANT AND SEEDLING SWAP EVENING
April 24th WORKSHOP – CREATIVE WILLOW ART.

If you would like to know anymore about the activities of the group, how to join or any of the above events phone Jill Davies on (01548) 853220.



WHAT'S ON ...

OUR CHANGING CLIMATE

Orchard Link member John Webber contacted me regarding the annual Dartington Lecture which he is helping to organise. He writes

"The Friends of Dartington invite all members of Orchard Link and others interested in environmental issues to the 8th Dartington Lecture to be given by SIR CRISPIN TICKELL GCMG KCVO on the subject of 'IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE' in The Great Hall, Dartington at 7pm on Thursday 25th February 1999. Free Admission.

Sir Crispin is an acknowledged international authority on environmental issues, and amongst his present activities he is chair of the Government Panel on Sustainable Development and Chair of the Climate Institute of Washington DC. He is director of the Green College, Oxford Centre for Environmental Policy and Understanding.

Sir Crispin's talk will refer to many of the influences affecting the world's environment and from his local knowledge will relate these impacts to the south west."

If you have any queries or need more details call John on (01803) 782351.

Orchard Issues

Some of the technical aspects of orcharding, how to plan and plant a new orchard and community orchards for the millennium are just some of the topics which will be covered at a special countryside orchard issues' day on 17th April.

The day is being organised by Michael Gee of the Dartington North Devon Trust to provide a focus for orchard owners and orchard experts to get together. The day will be stimulating and informative with talks and site visits – and it's a chance to bring your own particular problems or issues to discuss with the experts. There's also the chance to meet Dan Keene – Common Ground's new Community Orchards Officer – who will be joining us from London.

Full details of the event will be available from the end of February. It will be held at Eggesford (south of Barnstaple and accessible by train!) 10.30am-3.30pm. Tickets will cost £7.50 and include tea and coffee – buy or bring your own lunch. Places must be booked – call Michael on (01271) 376365 or fax on (01271) 326061 for details.

COLLEGE WAY ORCHARD NEEDS FRIENDS

If you live in or around Dartmouth, you may have witnessed the transformation of College Way Orchard – from an overgrown tangle of brambles to a beautiful managed orchard and open space. Whilst the initial work on this 10 acre site was carried out by the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers and the Coast and Countryside Service, Dartmouth Town Council who own the orchard now need local people to get involved and to keep it in tip top condition. The orchard which is open for everyone to enjoy now has 80 new apple trees of old and local varieties as well as a selection of its own tree / reputedly once planted by an admiral at Britannia Naval College and tended by cadets.

As the orchard is grazed by sheep (a small flock of charming long wools) maintenance work includes some gentle pruning and caring for the young apple trees and helping to encourage local groups to use and enjoy it too.

If you live nearby and would like to be a 'friend' in any way contact Chris Horan, the town clerk on (01803) 832281.

And if you're visiting Dartmouth why not call in – with stunning views over the Dart and lovely new wooden seats – it's the perfect place for a picnic. You can access the orchard off College Way – the main road into Dartmouth (park on The Embankment and walk up) or off the steep hill up past the Ship In Dock pub.



Spellbound by orchard tales – children listen to Storyteller Clive Fairweather above the orchard at Dartmouth Orchard Day last year.

BE ON YOUR GUARD

So, you've planned your beautiful traditional orchard, selected your trees – maybe by now you've even planted them. But have you considered the effect that stock grazing around the trees could have? It seems an obvious question but so often people plan a whole orchard – which they visualise as picturesquely grazed by sheep – yet forget the damage that these animals can do to mature, let alone young apple trees.

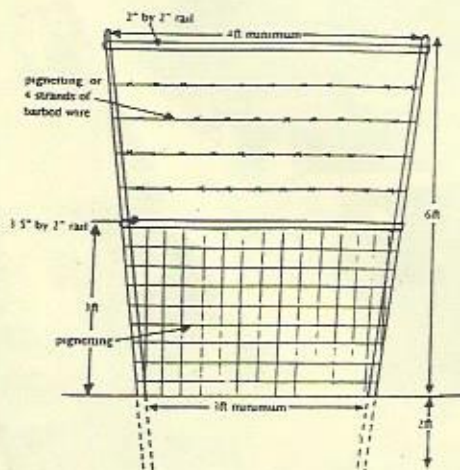
To sheep and cattle, apple trees provide a supply of fresh green leaves, sweet sap – which lies tantalisingly beneath the bark and a useful scratching post. So whilst I'd hate to spoil their fun, I would advise you to guard your trees now before you even consider grazing it.

Guards are easy to construct using standard fencing posts and mesh as the diagrams and details below show—they're something you can make yourself. Although they may cost – it's not worth skimping on them – for in the long run they will protect your trees and allow cattle or sheep to graze beneath – saving you the trouble of mowing and perhaps providing some grass keep money every year.

Consider too the effect of rabbits (you won't know you've got them till you plant trees!). A simple plastic spiral guard around the stem of each tree will foil them – and these are a must for all apple trees whether you graze your land or not.

Cattle Guard

A four cornered construction with 2" by 2" top and middle rails. Pignetting (C8/80/15 or similar) should be hung above and below the middle rail, it must be pulled taut and joined on a corner post. Barb wire may be substituted for pignetting above the middle rail. The corner posts must be of round tanalised timber, 8 feet tall. The exact design and specification is given below.



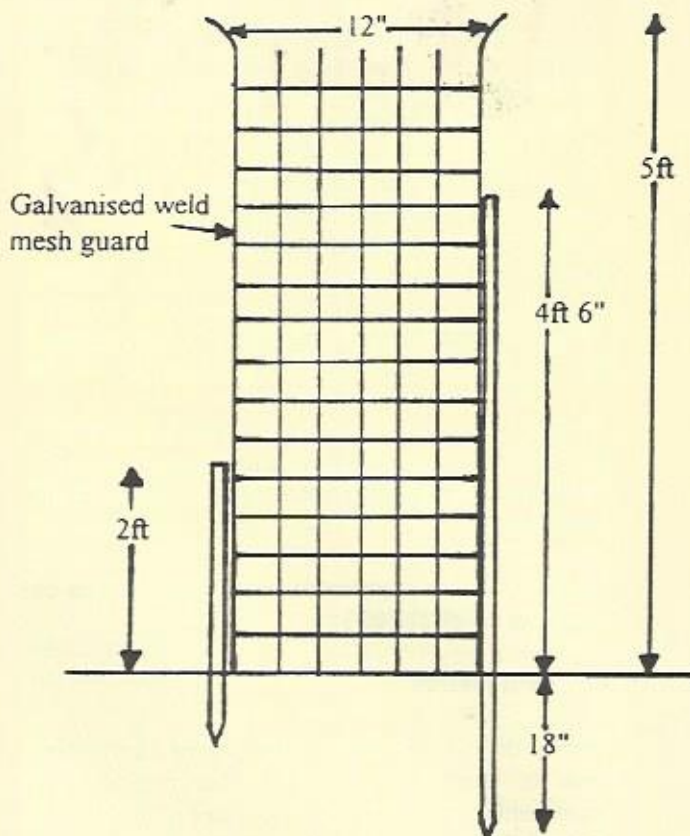
The uprights should not be canted too far from the vertical or the completed guard will not be stable.

Sheep Guard

As before but 5 or 6 feet high.

Or

A galvanised weld mesh guard, 5 feet high, stapled or wired to a tanalised 6 foot stake of 3" top diameter, knocked 18" into the ground and one short stake on the opposite side. The second stake is required to prevent animals twisting the guard around the tree.



MULCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING?

Once you've guarded your trees, the next vital and very cost effective job is to clear all the grass and weeds around the base of the tree – within the area of the guard. Grass you see, is particularly good at gathering moisture from the soil – it's certainly better at it than your newly planted tree – so come the first 'dry' spell and your new apple trees will die back – whilst the grass beneath will flourish.

The easiest way to remove the grass is simply to pull or dig it out – or spray. Cheaper, easier and more environmentally friendly is to use a mulch mat – a piece of heavy duty black plastic laid over the ground with the edges dug in to secure it. Mulching with plastic not only stops weeds but prevents moisture loss from the soil and raises the soil temperature in spring so encouraging earlier leaf growth.

You can buy mulch mats fairly cheaply from farm and garden suppliers – or make your own for nothing – from squares of thick plastic black fertiliser sacks or even old foam backed carpets – and do a little recycling into the bargain.

A Taste of the Westcountry

Recently I noticed that a new initiative had been set up to promote Westcountry food.

It's called "Westcountry Cooking" and could help Orchard Link to connect to local pubs, restaurants and other food producers who would like to source local apples.

Portia Dean, its co-ordinator explains...

Westcountry cooking was set up in late 1997 as an offshoot of the West and is funded by MAFF, the EU and private sector.

The aim of the company is to encourage the region's eating places to make full use of fresh local produce. If an increasing number of chefs use local produce and cook dishes that could be described as having a Westcountry flavour it is hoped that the South West could gain a reputation for having a distinctive cuisine to be proud of.

Westcountry Cooking produces two guides. Firstly, "The Guide to Good Food in the Westcountry" which details tea rooms, restaurants, pubs, B&Bs and hotels which serve a significant proportion of Westcountry foods and use a majority of local suppliers. The company also produces a "Food Finder" which is a guide available to anybody in the catering trade listing local producers, at no cost, to enable them as easily as possible to locate suppliers in their locality. In addition, so far three cookery books have been published and more will follow all featuring both modern and traditional Westcountry recipes. This year also sees the first "Best Westcountry Eating Place" awards, which recognise those whose menus represent the cream of Westcountry produce.

The success of the Westcountry Cooking campaign relies largely upon the support of the public and a Supporters Club was set up a year ago and has a growing membership. The Club organises a number of events from cheese tastings to cookery demonstrations which are open to members and non-members alike and members benefit from discounted event tickets and publications.

For more information, to join the club, or offer support please contact:

Portia Dean
Westcountry Cooking
Agriculture House
Pynes Hill
Rydon Lane
Exeter EX2 5ST

We hope to organise a joint event later in the year – for further details see the next edition of Orchard Link News.



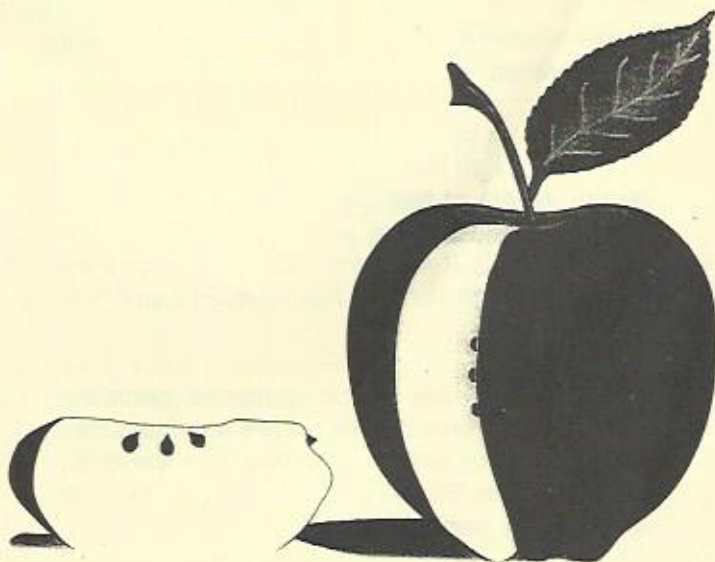
Grant for South Hams Orchard Owners

Don't forget, that thanks to European funding, grants are available towards orchard planting and restoration in certain parishes of the South Hams – but only those in the '5b' area (a designation made by Europe!).

If you live in the following parishes you may be eligible for payments towards pruning, planting, fencing and protecting against stock. Call Trudy Turrell at the Coast and Countryside Service on (01803) 861140 for details before you start work.

- Asprington
- Aveton Gifford
- Berry Pomeroy
- Charleton
- Churchstow
- Cornworthy
- Dartington
- Dartmouth
- Dittisham
- East Portlemouth
- Ermington
- Kingsbridge
- Kingswear
- Marldon
- Modbury
- Salcombe
- Slapton
- South Brent*
- South Pool
- Stoke Fleming
- Stoke Gabriel
- Stokenham
- Strete
- Totnes
- Ugborough*

*Only those parts of the parishes outside the National Park boundary.



WHICH APPLE TREE SHALL I PLANT? PART II

In the last issue I looked at some of the basic considerations to think about when choosing the variety of apple tree to plant. This included factors such as uses for the apples, taste and disease resistance.

There are also other things to think about, some of which are often overlooked. The first is the size of tree you wish to grow, which is determined by the rootstock on which the cultivar is grafted. Traditional or 'standard' apple trees have graced the Devon landscape for centuries. If you have room they are the trees to grow, for their beauty and for the large number of apples they produce, or even for their 'climbability' for your children. Their drawbacks are the difficulty in picking and pruning on a large tree, and the longer time period before first producing apples. These trees are grown on an M25 or MM III rootstock.

The next size down is a semi-dwarfing rootstock, most commonly an MM 106, producing a mature tree 4-5 metres tall, suitable for most gardens. You can use this size of tree to create trained forms of tree such as a cordon or espalier, both grown against walls. Or why not consider step-over trees, as a living and productive fence, as a border for your vegetable garden, for example?

Dwarf trees are grown on an M9 or M26 rootstock. They grow to the size of a medium shrub, and are convenient, especially in a small garden, but do not expect to be loaded down with apples! Good soil and growing conditions are required for dwarf trees.

The next consideration is the location the trees are to be grown in. I mentioned the influence of the moist Devon climate in the last issue, but equally important is the microclimate of your orchard. The majority of Devon is great for growing apples, but two locations need special consideration.

If you have a particularly windswept site, or one over 150m high, this can have a significant effect on the variety of tree which will grow well. The following varieties are worth trying in such a location: Ben's Red, Black Dabinett, Devonshire Quarrenden, Stoke Red or Improved Lambrook Pippin.

The other location which demands particular thought is the frost pocket, where late frosts can damage the blossom and hence ruin the crop. Choosing late-flowering cultivars will help to alleviate this problem.

Finally, you must remember that apple trees are rarely self-pollinating, requiring the kind service of bees, bringing pollen from other varieties flowering at the same time. If only planting a few trees, it is therefore vital that you check that flowering times will overlap. The exception to this rule is the triploid variety (Bramley's for example) which do not have viable pollen of their own and thus need to be pollinated by two other varieties.

It may sound like there is a lot to consider when choosing which apples to grow. Well there is! Help is at hand, however. Good nurseries, including Scotts of Merriott, Duchy of Cornwall and Thornhayes Nurseries all provide useful information such as flowering and cropping times, and are likely to be helpful if you ask them for advice. You are also welcome to call me on (01803) 868962 for free technical advice.

And finally, don't let it worry you, it may seem complicated, but whatever you choose you will still have apple trees on which apples grow.

Happy Picking!

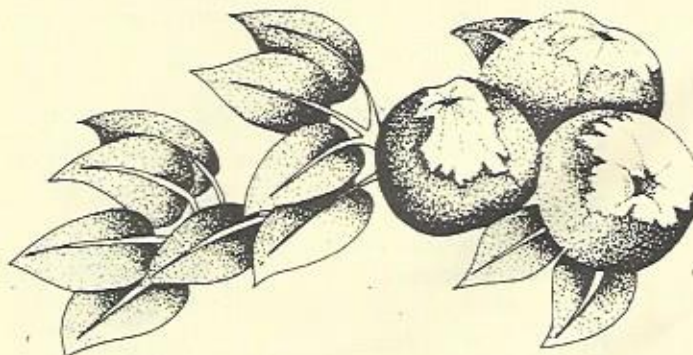
Ben Pike
South Hams Orchard Services

GRAFTWOOD WANTED

If you have old Devon varieties of apple trees (and you know their names), the Devon Orchard Project would like some graftwood – from which they will propagate new trees.

Graftwood is really just last year's growth – which is cut from the tips of the branches and does no harm at all to the mature tree. It is cut now, whilst trees are dormant and not growing, and grafted onto rootstock to form a new tree in March when the trees just start to grow again.

If you can help call either Ben Pike at the number above or Hilary Burns on (01803) 553144.



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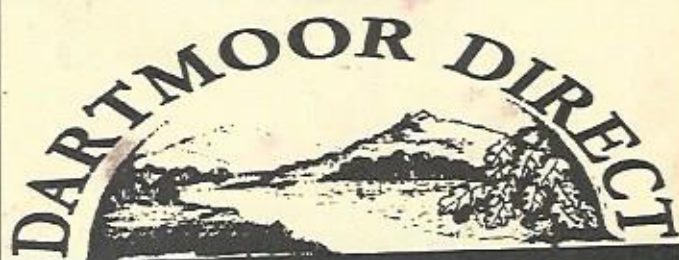
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St Andrews Wood, Dulford, Cullompton, Devon EX15 2DF

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Email trees@thornhayes.demon.co.uk



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DEVON COUNTRY GARDENER is happy to be associated with Orchard Link to publicise and promote their events throughout the year in Devon.

Devon Country Gardener magazine is available free from nurseries and garden centres, National Trust and open gardens, or direct by subscription from Landsman Publishing Ltd on 01297 551001

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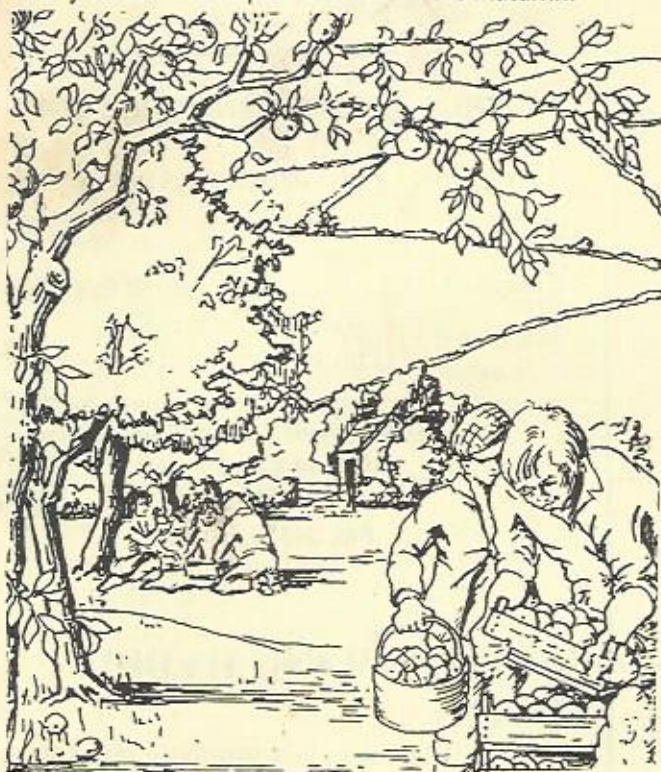
APPLE TREES IN 20 TRADITIONAL AND MODERN VARIETIES AT £3.90 each

For a free information sheet or advice telephone Gordon Hill on 01404 812229, or write to Bowhayes Farm, Venn Ottery, Ottery St. Mary, Devon EX11 1RX. Fax No. 01404 815800.

AN APPLE A DAY

Mr Peardon from Chard contacted me recently. He had heard about Orchard Link in the Sunday Independent and called in search of Blenheim Orange and Newton Wonder apples. Apparently he follows a healthy diet which contains plenty of apples and he has found that not only do Blenheims and Newtons taste good but they keep well through the year.

As the apples are only for his personal consumption, he doesn't need large quantities – but is very happy to travel down and pick the apples off the trees himself. so if you have either of these varieties please give him a call on 01460 221101 so he can make a date in his diary to come and pick the fruit in the Autumn.



ORCHARD LINK – WE'RE HERE TO HELP YOU

The Orchard Linkline system is still running and we are happy to deal with any orchard or Orchard Link enquiries.

- * Call Trudy Turrell for general Orchard Link enquiries plus details of orchard grants in the South Hams (see inside) at the Coast and Countryside Service, Follaton House, Plymouth Road, Totnes TQ9 5NE.
Tel: (01803) 861140 Monday – Friday (office hours)
Or
- * Call Ben Pike of South Hams Orchard Services with your orchard enquiries e.g. managing your trees, pruning, pests and diseases etc.
Tel: (01803) 868962 (evenings are often best but the answerphone is always on).

OOPS!

If you called us in the past for orcharding advice but are still waiting for a reply – could you call Ben Pike direct on the number above. He will be happy to help.

FINALLY - We need feedback!

Orchard Link News is your newsletter – in which you can reflect your views, offer your ideas and share your knowledge with others. Maybe you'd like to swap tools or graftwood, share books or equipment, visit the orchards of other members – or offer to host an 'open afternoon' so that they can visit your land. Write to Trudy Turrell at the address above and she will print your ideas in the next edition.

THANK YOU!

Our thanks go to the Coast and Countryside Service and Leader II for their support of Orchard Link and this newsletter.

Coast & Countryside



Application for membership of Orchard Link.

First name: _____
Surname: _____
House/No: _____
Street: _____
Village/Town: _____
County: _____
Post Code: _____

I/we wish to apply for membership of Orchard Link. I enclose the sum of £15.00 as payment for this years subscription (February 1999- February 2000).

Signed _____

Contact telephone No _____ day: _____ evening: _____

How many trees do you have? _____

Acreage? _____

What varieties of apple do you have? (if known) _____

Are you? a) Orchard owner ... b) Cider maker... c) Horticultural contractor... d) Nursery...
e) Interested individual....

What condition are your tree stocks in? Good ---- Fair ---- Poor ----- (please tick as appropriate).

The information requested is solely for the use of Orchard Link and will remain confidential.