

Orchard Link NEWS

'Saving Traditional Orchards'

www.orchardlink.org.uk



Apples and the Olympics

Jade Bartlett

By the time this goes to print the Olympics will be over and the Paralympics in full swing, didn't we do well. But as I was swept up in Olympic Mania, which even reached far down into the depths of South Devon, I was wondering if apples were ever significant to the games. We know from history that it was a tradition for the Olympic victor to be crowned with an olive branch, which hints that the games were an agricultural or seasonal festival. But there is also some evidence that the victor's wreath was not originally from the olive tree. One ancient writer tells that in the sixth Olympiad, the Delphic oracle was consulted as to how the victors should be crowned, and the message was: "Do not make the fruit of the apple tree the prize of victory, but take the wild olive." Consequently, the first victor to be crowned with olive was the winner of the foot race in the 7th Olympiad. Before this the fruit of the apple tree seems to have been the prize of victory. I wonder why the oracle chose the olive tree instead?



Don't forget! This will be your last newsletter from Orchard Link if you have not yet re-joined. Just £12 for the year includes expert advice from Charles Staniland, discounted prices for our courses, apple pressing equipment hire and a tri-annual newsletter packed with useful information.

Cheques to our new address please (see back of newsletter).

Thanks for your continued support.

Welcome to your Summer/Autumn 2012 Newsletter.

How has the weird weather affected our apple trees?

Jade Bartlett

If you are keeping a low profile and letting the Olympics or the Jubilee wash over you, then it has certainly been aided by some heavy rain. What weird weather we have been experiencing... but what does this mean for our fruit and orchards?

An email from one Orchard Link member suggests an interesting reason for the reduced fruit set: "Last year we had a bumper crop; the largest we have had in the 40 years that we have been in Salcombe. I used Orchard Link's equipment to make some 40 L of apple juice. This year the trees were covered in blossom, but there is virtually no fruit set. The reason I think is because of lack of insects at the critical time, during the cold, wet weather. Are there other reports a similar experience?" Dr . Peter Goldsworthy

Another member has suggested to me that the sudden and heavy hail storms that we experienced in April, meant that the blossom and young fruit of both plums and apples were exposed to ice and a physical battering, knocking them flying.

I wonder if the high winds just blew the blossom from the trees.

Kevin Croucher, Manager of Thornhayes Nursery Ltd in Cullompton has taken the time to share his experience of the topic on everyone's lips as we gaze jealously at other's orchards, which, do not seem to have been affected. Hopefully the some reasons why will become clearer:

Summer? What Summer?

Kevin Croucher

This is probably the worst year I have experienced in a horticultural career spanning 36 years. We started out with the driest winter on record following a dry but cold summer of 2011. Then searing, summer like, day temperatures in March, accompanied by biting frosts at night. April was the wettest on record. May seemed quite okay. June was the wettest on record followed by an equally wet July, which ended with a brief but searing heat wave. All in all, a year to remember, but certainly not one to grow bumper crops of

quality fruit. However, despite all this, some things have come up trumps. So let's look at what and why.

The first thing to consider is genetics. Those varieties of apple and pear with good inherent resistance to scab and canker will still be looking healthy and bearing some fruit if you are very lucky. At Thornhayes, the only pear with fruit on is a cordon of Fondante de Automne. It is very disease resistant and has the most wonderful fruits that ripen in early September. Dessert and culinary apple varieties that are healthy and carrying fruit include the ever reliable Tom Putt and Lord Derby, a healthy and very tasty aristocrat of cooking apples. George Cave an early crisp red dessert, has a reasonable crop, as have Tidcombe Seedling, Lucombes Seedling, Oaken Pin, Nine Square, Plympton Pippin, Newton Wonder and the best of all dessert apples Ashmead's Kernel has a very good crop. Of course what these fruits need now, is some warm sunshine to ripen them and make the later season varieties fit for storage.

Plums have suffered much less well. Those that did set fruit have had a high proportion of the fruit go brown and rot. Some of the later varieties may produce some decent fruit, but only if the rain stops and the sun comes out.

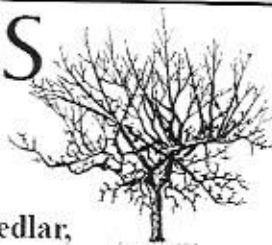
Because we did have a bit of decent weather in May, some of the generally later flowering cider apples are carrying reasonable crops of fruit. I've always found Sweet Coppin to be a shy cropper, but this year it has the best crop I've ever had. Other ever reliable varieties with fruit on are Harry Masters Jersey, Black Dabinett, Paignton Marigold and the normally very troublesome Kingston Black is looking healthy and carrying a good crop.

Genetics is really showing itself this year if you grow Quince. The main problem is Quince Leaf Spot or Leaf Blight, a fungal disease, at its worst in wet weather and high humidity. On several sites I know, Meeches Prolific has been totally defoliated, whilst Vranja and Serbian Gold seem fairly healthy. I even have fruit on Serbian Gold.

One final point to consider is siting of fruit trees. Many people come to the nursery and expect to be able to grow fruit trees on poorly draining or low lying land. This year has driven home that this

doesn't work. Poorly drained sites encourage canker and persistent waterlogging of roots kills trees.

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Press Hire From the Treasurer's Perspective.

Two years ago the committee decided to reduce the membership fee from £18 to £12; this was possibly due to the income generated by the press hire service operated by Orchard Link.

Last season was the best ever in terms of the number of hirings and income. The system is that you as a member of Orchard Link hire the equipment and then pay me. I must say the vast majority of hirers pay promptly, some even in advance of using the equipment. Then there is the minority!! No names mentioned, who have to be reminded, chased and their excuses deciphered. So thank you all the long and the short and the tall.

Grumpy Treasure - AKA Mick Godfrey

Fireblight in Herefordshire

In the last month there have been many outbreaks of fireblight in cider apples, particularly in young orchards in Herefordshire. Initially, outbreaks have been associated with the cultivar Gilly but the disease is now appearing in other cultivars.

Fireblight is caused by the bacteria *Erwinia amylovora* and is usually associated with pears but it can be significant on certain susceptible apple varieties notably Gala and Egremont Russet, and on late flowering cider apple varieties - Vilberie and Brown Snout. Young apple trees of all cultivars are particularly susceptible.

First obvious symptoms are dead blossoms (*see picture*) or dark brown leaves hanging from a truss or branch. These result from spring or summer infection of blossom. The bark of diseased areas or branches (cankers) is dark-green or dark brown, often water soaked and with an indistinct margin between healthy and infected tissue.

Shoot infection on apple is characteristic - initially the tips wilt and droop without browning and at this stage golden droplets of bacterial ooze are often seen on the affected stem (*see picture*). Later, leaves and stem become brown. Symptoms also appear on fruit as brown irregular blotches, resembling bruises or sun scorch.

During warm humid weather, a glistening whitish/cream bacterial slime may ooze from affected shoots, branches and fruits. In dry weather, ooze becomes desiccated and appears as a silvery film on affected surfaces.

Fireblight can be confused with some fungal diseases such as blossom wilt (*Monilinia laxa f.sp.mali*) which can also cause blossom death and shoot dieback. The presence of bacterial ooze distinguishes fireblight and blossom wilt but both may be present in the same orchard.

Bacteria overwinter in orchard trees and in hedgerow hawthorn and susceptible ornamentals (e.g. Pyracantha, Cotoneaster, Sorbus, whitebeam, mountain ash) in adjacent gardens in bark tissue along the edges of cankers formed from previous year's infections. In spring these bacteria multiply and produce ooze.

In wet weather ooze spread by wind-blown rain and insects infects flowers in spring or shoot tips. *E. amylovora* can also invade via wounds (especially young shoots damaged by hail or wind) and

natural openings such as nectathodes, hydathodes, lenticels, leaf scars. The bacteria then invade the tissues giving rise to typical symptoms.

Fireblight risk is greatest when temperatures exceed 18°C and there is rain. Disease development occurs between 5-30°C with an optimum temperature of 27°C.

There are no recommended chemical control measures. Control is dependent on understanding the disease, prevention, vigilance and rapid action when symptoms are seen.

Make routine inspections for fireblight symptoms soon after leaf fall, during winter pruning, soon after bud break, about mid-June and in late July to early August - Inspect young trees more frequently.

Make additional inspections: if there is frost damage to blossom, following damaging storms, following warnings of fireblight, or following reports of fireblight elsewhere.

Remove and burn diseased parts of young apple trees as soon as possible. Cut through healthy wood well below diseased wood to ensure thorough removal. On mature apple trees this might not be cost effective and is less urgent.

On twigs or shoots cut out 12 ins (about 300 mm) below stain; on branches (of 1 in or more in diameter) cut out at least 18 ins (about 450 mm) below stain. Start exploratory knife cuts in healthy tissue first and move up.

Disinfect tools between cuts and between trees preferably using a recommended disinfectant (3% Hycolin, Sudol or Clearsol). Thorough removal of plant residues from the tools is essential for maximum effectiveness of disinfectants i.e. wipe the blade with a sponge or cloth soaked in the disinfectant rather than just dipping the blade.

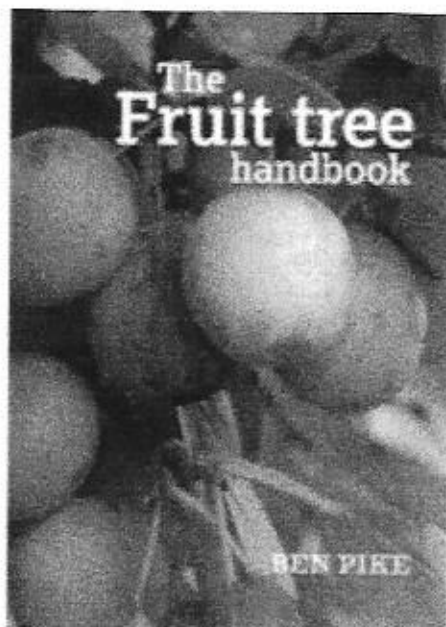
Hawthorn hedges can be infected with fireblight and are a major source of the disease for orchards. Any adjacent hedgerows should be well-trimmed to prevent flowering.

With thanks to DEFRA and Angela Berrie, East Malling Research, August 2012.

The Fruit Tree Handbook by Ben Pike

Reviewed by Gill Gairdner

For everyone associated with Orchard Link, Ben has been a key figure - both as an unassuming source of pomological knowledge and as someone who for years quietly brought together people of all kinds in order to promote and advance the growing of fruit in the South West.



In this book, which was published last summer, he has distilled the knowledge gained from decades of observation, practice and reading and it covers - as no other current publication does - the cultivation of all types of tree fruit, from traditional apples, pears, plum and cherries to tender apricots, nectarines and peaches. His approach is that of the gardener, so it is a thoroughly practical guide, with clear descriptions of planting and general management backed up by the many excellent illustrations. It encompasses the rescue of old orchards and is up to date in covering the relatively new phenomenon of community orchards. Unusually for a horticultural handbooks it also takes regionality into account and is particularly good on the recommendation of cultivars for particular parts of the country.

For such an ambitiously comprehensive account, with much more explanatory detail than is usual, the book is surprisingly manageable, fit to be balanced open on a wheelbarrow. Which is a good thing, because the sometimes mysterious matter of pruning is handled with special clarity. We're given the 'why' as well as the 'how' of pruning of all kinds, and there are very good diagrams - as well as some wonderful photographs of what happens if you do nothing or, God forbid, the wrong thing. And although so primarily a guide, Ben's profound love for orchards and their natural environment is implicit throughout. The emphasis is on maintaining the natural health of trees and there is an organic approach to pest and disease control.

This is a book for both the beginner and the more experienced grower: indeed, it may be the only book that you will need. The publisher, Green Books, is to be praised for the very high quality of layout and the ready way information required can be extracted.

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Events

by Jade Bartlett

For booking or more info, phone me on 07813819591 or email me at info@orchardlink.org.uk. Unless otherwise stated.

Please see the website www.orchardlink.org.uk for event information.

Training

Cider Production.

Venue Brimblescombe Cider Makers.

10 am to 3 pm

Sunday 5th November 2012

Whole day working along side Ron and Bev, the cidermakers, we will get an introduction to the 400 year-old press and machinery. Then help with the cider production in 'the olde cyder barn'. At our last visit in 2012 after an hours work we had milled three tonnes of apples and squeezed gallons of juice from the amazing feat of engineering that was Ron's apple and straw tower. To end the afternoon we will be privy to sampling Brimblescombe's ciders, including vintage ciders and some conditioned in old brandy and rum casks. As Ben Pike rightly said "this is about as much fun as you can have with your clothes on!"

Country Shows

With thanks to the South Devon AONB Orchard link has been invited to attend the following country shows. Please do come along and see us or volunteer to help man our informative stall.

We will be at the Totnes Show on 26th August and the Kingsbridge Show on 1st September 2012.

Apple Days

confirmed so far... please see our website for more...

Sun 30th September. Autumn Apple Pressing & Wild Food Forage - Chillington, near Kingsbridge - with The Woodland Trust & Trees for Health. 10.30am - 4pm. Contact Liz Turner, Trees for Health, 07765 631877, info@treesforhealth.org adults £3, children £1.50.

Sat and Sun 13th/14th October. Apple and Cider Festival. Eggesford Garden Centre. 11am - 4pm. Free. www.eggesfordgardens.com

Sat 20th Oct, Poltimore Apple Day, Poltimore House, Poltimore, Exeter, Devon EX4 0AU

Other Organisations

Cider Making Workshop

10am - 4pm

Venue: Ocombe Cookery School

Sunday 30th September

Discover the art of cider making in this practical one day workshop: Included in this workshop you will learn how to work out the sugar mix and gravity; you will get an introduction to the equipment required; and a hands-on demonstration of the equipment in milling apples, making the cheeses, pressing and storing the apple juice. £40 per person.

Ornamental Autumn Fruit Trees

1:30pm - 4pm

Venue: Thornhayes Nursery

Thursday 13th September

In association with the Royal Horticultural Society. Kevin Croucher will lead a walk of the nursery and grounds to consider a range of trees and large shrubs that provide ornamental fruits for decoration and wildlife. 1.30 - 4pm. Tea/Coffee on arrival. £21 per person. Contact 01884 266746 to book a place

Apple Tasting

1:30pm - 4pm

Venue: Thornhayes Nursery

Thursday 18th October

Kevin Croucher will lead you in an autumnal sampling feast of a range of varieties of dessert and culinary apples and apple recipes. 1.30 - 4pm. £21(£17.50 plus VAT) per person. Tea/Coffee on arrival. Contact 01884 266746 to book.

Member's Meet Ups

We meet up every 6 weeks to share orchard news, have a meal and a drink and to discuss Orchard Link. You can find us at The Church House Inn, Harberton at 6:30 for a meal and 7:30 for meeting. Meetings are open to all members, please do come along and join in. Meetings are a social gathering with a little bit of running our group thrown in.

The next meetings are:

Wednesday 30th August 2012

Wednesday 10th October 2012

Wednesday 21st November 2012

Wednesday 12th December 2012 *Christmas Meal*

Really Easy Pork in Cider *by Veronica Cross, Committee Member*

Quantities of all ingredients are up to you !!

A pork chop per person

Chopped cooking apples

Glug of dry cider

Bouquet garni, bay leaves, salt & pepper

Chopped onions

Dash of Calvados if you have it

Chicken stock

Brown meat, soften onions, add apples, flame Calvados, add cider & stock to cover contents, add herbs & seasoning.

Cover and cook in a moderate oven until tender.

Thicken to taste with a melted butter & flour mixture (I add some hot casserole liquid to the roux, mix well and then add to the casserole and heat stirring constantly to avoid lumps).

Enjoy...!!

This freezes really well, so why not batch cook to save time and energy... You can also make it with apples stored in the freezer !

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HELP!

Mick Godfrey

My vegetable garden is full of young apple trees looking for a good home. In the spring of 2011 I undertook to graft 10 Devon varieties of apples for the new Devon Wild Life Trust orchard at Woodah Farm, Doddiscombsleigh. The graft wood was obtained from Thornhays Nursery mother orchard as the varieties in question are not currently in their catalogue. I grafted two of each variety on M25 and one each on MM106 root stocks to ensure I could meet the order. The spare trees will be available this autumn.

Earlier this year I grafted 30 apples of various varieties, some for my own planting and the rest will be available plus a few pears; the graft wood for these was supplied by Ben Pike from Sharpham, where he worked.

As I now have 65 apple varieties and 7 plums growing as cordons and no more space for further planting, I have decided to cut my grafting activities. However I am still prepared to graft trees for members of Orchard Link if they supply me with graft wood or specifically request a variety I have growing here.

If anyone is considering planting cordons, then I am very happy for them to contact me and I will pass on any information, tips and pitfalls I have experienced; whilst my garden is far from a model orchard, it seems to thrive.

I can be contacted on 01548 821156. Evenings best.

Atheletic Links with Apples - Atlanta's Race

Edited by Jade Bartlett

Atalanta was an athletic girl, raised by a bear in the mountains. She was a virgin and a huntress. She was also an excellent runner and no one could catch her. Atalanta was pursued by a steady parade of admirers, but was a sworn virgin and did not want a husband. She finally agreed to her father's wishes for her to marry by proposing a test, she would marry anyone who could beat her in a race, but any challenger who could not beat her would be killed. As Atlanta was one of the fastest mortals, this she thought would insure her virginal vows.

For quite some time this worked. Some say that she evened the odds by wearing armor while she ran. Others say that she gave the suitors a head start of half the distance. In any case she won the races and remained unmarried.

Until, Melanion fell in love with her. He knew that he was not fast enough to win the race. So he did what many frustrated lovers have done. He prayed to Aphrodite for help. Aphrodite has a weakness for lovers, so she presented Melanion with three golden apples and a plan.

Melanion then ran his race with Atlanta, carrying the apples with him. When Atlanta caught up to him he tossed the first apple at her feet. The sight of the magic golden apple was irresistible to Atlanta. She stopped to pick it up confident that she could make up the time. Soon enough she was once again passing Melanion. He threw the second apple, this time further to the side. Again, she lost time retrieving the apple. As she again caught up, the finish line was near and chasing the third thrown apple cost her the race and she married Melanion.



Sources

The Oxford Companion to English Literature, Sir Paul Harvey. 1967.
www.greekmythology.com

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Crispin's Cider Tips

by Ray Willis and Crispin Adams

As part of our Annual Gathering, back in March at Rattery Village Hall, we had a Juice and Cider Tasting. Members were encouraged to enter their produce under various categories: Dry, Sweet, Sparkling etc. Quite an impressive table of produce resulted and everybody present got the chance to have a taste and provide blind scores. I was most fortunate in winning the cider categories and have subsequently been queried as to the secrets of success...

Apples - I'd encourage open mindedness in your selection of apples, those that are delightful to eat fresh can make a rather insipid cider. Don't rule anything out; all my entries were made from leftovers after various community events. I like to think that some of the goodwill generated at such events made its way into the cider. Perhaps I was just incredibly lucky to chance across good apples for this purpose or perhaps the very reason they were left (being rather crabby or overripe) aided my cause? What's clear is that many an apple rejected on grounds of looks (or even a bite or two) has turned out a surprisingly respectable juice and in this case, prize-winning cider.



Yeast - All my entries undertook their primary fermentation (the vigorous foamy bit) on naturally occurring yeasts. I didn't need to add anything or do anything special to start them fermenting (it was just freshly pressed juice left alone in a plastic fermenting vessel under airlock). In the case of the Sparkling category, I sulphited with Campden tablets towards the end (about 15 degrees sugar left) and after racking, reseeded with a dried cider yeast for bottle conditioning.

Hygiene - I ramp up my levels of cleanliness towards the end of the process. Anything more than a rinse of the apples and pressing equipment is counter productive if you want to use natural yeasts. However, when preparing kegs, bottles and siphon tubes I normally use baby bottle sterilising solution (Milton). My advice is to be especially careful with soapy detergents, like washing-up liquid, which can easily taint your cider.

Sweetness - Ideally your fermentation ceases leaving behind residual sugars. More often than not though cider will ferment out to dryness (esp. if you've encouraged fermentation in the first instance). Adding sugar will sweeten it again, but often it will become unstable and start to ferment again. Repeated cold rackings are my preference to reducing the nutrients in the cider and hence improving its stability, but there are several alternatives.

In summary then I'd encourage cider enthusiasts to focus less on starting their fermentation and more on how to control its later stages. Like driving a car downhill, you need to be careful it doesn't run away with itself (and accelerating on the brow is probably unwise).

EDITOR'S NOTES

by Jade Bartlett

The committee is still looking for a volunteer editor for the Newsletter and more importantly an Events Co-ordinator to work with me on our events calendar. If you can spare some time and would like to be more involved in supporting Orchard Link please do email Jade at info@orchardlink.org.uk. Any time you can spare would be appreciated.

Don't forget to re-join after you have read this newsletter. £12 for the year, please send cheques to our new address below.

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