

Winter 2010

Volume 10.3

ORCHARD LINK NEWS

www.orchardlink.org.uk



Winds of Change for Orchard Link

by Jade Bartlett



Windy Tree from www.thomasbilly.wordpress.com

The winds of change have been blowing through the Orchard Link Committee during 2010. Key members of the former committee have this year decided to stand down after volunteering to work so hard for the organisation.

It was a tense time leading up to the Annual General Meeting held on the 6th October at The Church House Inn, Harberton. Tony Harber was to step down from the roles of Chairman and Newsletter Editor, Ben Pike from Event Co-ordinating and Ray Willis from Membership Secretary. For a time this year there was a real chance that Orchard Link would not have a committee to run it and therefore would have to close up shop.

However, on the 6th October the worried former committee members let out a sigh of relief when three fresh faces turned up having heard their many pleas for help over the year. Thank goodness our Treasurer, Mick Godfrey's sad premonition in last season's newsletter, "I have a terrible foreboding that before long I shall turn up at the pub for a meeting and feel very lonely with my paper work and glass of ginger beer" was averted.

I would like to thank Tony, Ray and Ben for their hard work both past and ensuing to ensure the sustainability of Orchard Link for us all. I would like to welcome to the committee Peter Snowxal our new Membership Secretary and introduce myself as the new Chairperson and Newsletter Editor.

Welcome to the Winter 2010 Newsletter.

We are still short on help. Orchard Link would love to hear from anyone who can offer a few hours and help us continue and expand our services. We are actively looking for help with the website and editing the newsletter but any help would be appreciated.

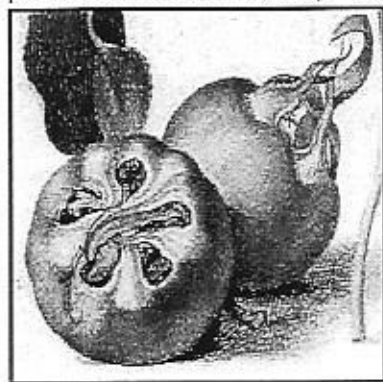
Email Jade at info@orchardlink.org.uk or phone on 07813 819591.

Though its fruit can be a challenge to use, the medlar is an ornamental tree in the garden, spreading in habit and blessed with white or pink flowers, unusual-looking fruits, and clear yellow and red colours in the autumn. Lee Reich described the medlar as a fruit "lost in the Middle Ages", but with inventiveness, the fruit can be a worthwhile addition to the fruit garden. The fruits are hard and acidic until they are bletted, a process that involves ripening them until they are semi-rotten and taste like toffee apples.

HISTORY: Medlars are native to northern Iran and the Caucasus region. They spread to the Mediterranean, through the Greeks and Romans by the 2nd century AD. The fruit was popular in the Middle Ages. The medlar declined in popularity when more palatable fruits began to be cultivated and imported from abroad. It is now seen as a curiosity and an acquired taste.

CULTIVATION: Medlars are attractive, spreading trees, whose size will depend on the rootstock onto which they are grafted. Quince rootstocks will produce a small tree around 3.5-5.5m in height and around 5m in width. Hawthorn rootstocks produce slightly bigger trees, but with less stable roots. Medlars can also be grafted onto wild pear rootstocks, leading to very large trees about 10m in height and spread. Although these are rare now there is a good example in an orchard in Stoke Gabriel. They enjoy a wide variety of well-draining soils. Warmth, sun and shelter are all important for the crop to ripen thoroughly. Harsh easterly winds can damage the flowers and young leaves. Compost or manure, applied as a mulch in the spring, will provide sufficient nutrients in all but the poorest soils. If needs be, a high potash fertiliser such as comfrey or rock potash can be added to improve fruiting potential.

VARIETIES: There is a very limited selection of medlar varieties to choose from. Medlars are self-fertile, so only one tree needs to be grown to produce a worthwhile crop. All varieties flower in late May, when the likelihood of damaging frost has passed.



DUTCH (or Large Dutch)- has the largest fruits, usually used for cooking. The tree is vigorous and spreads.

NOTTINGHAM- this variety grows well, but the fruit is prone to splitting and rotting when ripening. The fruit is small, flavoursome. The tree is more compact and upright in habit than most varieties.

ROYAL-a fairly upright tree. Fruits are medium sized with a good flavour.

PRUNING: Medlars are spreading trees that are usually grown as bushes on top of a clear trunk of 1-1.4m. The length of clear trunk prevents the lower branches from dragging on the ground. Medlars should be pruned in the winter, although damaged branches can be tidied up at any time.

If you are planting a maiden (one year old) tree, only cut back the lowest laterals by half (if they are present). In the second winter, select the laterals that will be kept to form the main branches of the tree in years to come. Remove the leader just above the top-most lateral. Remove any laterals that were shortened the previous winter. Once mature, medlars need very little pruning, only the removal of congested growth and the shortening of long branches. They form fruit on naturally-occurring spurs and sideshoots. Medlar trees often produce suckers originating from the base of the tree. It is best to remove these, preferably by pulling, or if this is not possible by cutting. It is important not to prune a medlar too heavily because you will stimulate strong vertical growth. For this reason, it is difficult to renovate a medlar by pruning; a soft touch is the watchword when pruning them.

DISEASE AND PESTS: Medlars are normally healthy trees that suffer little from the pests and diseases that affect most fruit trees. Hawthorn Leaf Spot is the only disease that has a particular affinity to medlars. This is characterised by multiple brown or purple spots 1-2mm (1/32 - 1/16 inches) appearing on the leaves. In severe cases the leaves will turn yellow and fall from the tree. The only method of control is to pick up the infected leaves and either burn them or remove them from the garden. Pruning out areas of overcrowded growth and allowing good air circulation will also help to keep this disease under control. Aside from this disease, there are no problems specific to medlars, although they can still be affected by more general problems such as honey fungus or nutrient deficiencies.

HARVESTING: It is best to leave medlars on the tree as long as possible; this usually means picking them in late October or early November, around the time of leaf fall, when they part easily from the tree.

At the time of picking, medlars are inedible due to their astringency; they need to be 'bletted' before they can be eaten. Bletting is the process of allowing the fruit to become soft and semi-rotten during storage. The fruit needs to be kept calyx down in a cool, dry, frost-free place for several weeks before it is ready. A wooden tray or cardboard box is an ideal container. The fruits should not be touching so as to prevent rot spreading amongst them. The skin becomes wrinkled and darker and the flesh changes from off-white to brown during this process.

USING: When the bletting is complete, the fruit tastes like a smoky apple sauce. The simplest way to consume medlars is to eat the flesh raw; wine and cheese are traditional accompaniments. In some Mediterranean

regions, a straw is inserted into the fruit so the flesh can be sucked out. Medlars can be roasted over a fire or baked in an oven, then served as a dessert, perhaps with cream or wine.



However, most medlars are used for making sweet preserves of some kind. Medlar jelly is perhaps the most well-known, but jam is also made. Medlar cheese is a thick pulpy method of preserving the fruit, adding only sugar and seasoning with allspice and cinnamon. A different type of medlar cheese uses eggs and butter to create a preserve-like lemon curd. Medlar fudge is another idea, using the thick consistency and sweet, smoky flavour to accentuate the traditional sweet. Although most preserves are used as sweet dishes, medlar jelly can also be served with game. As with most fruits, inventiveness is the name of the game.

Hugh Fernleigh-Whittingstall's Medlar Jelly

- 1kg medlars (quartered but not peeled)
- 500g Bramley cooking apples
- About 650g granulated sugar

Method: How to make medlar jelly

1. Quarter the medlars. Peel and chop the apples and tip the fruit into a preserving pan, or any heavy-bottomed, deep, wide pan, with just enough water to cover.
2. Bring to a simmer and cook for 30-45 minutes, until the medlars are soft and pulpy.
3. Strain through a jelly bag on a stand set over a large bowl. Don't be tempted to poke, squeeze or force the pulp through the bag or you'll get a cloudy jelly, just leave it to drip over the bowl for several hours or overnight.
4. Measure the juice, pour into a clean preserving pan and bring to boiling point before adding the sugar (for every 1l of juice, add 650g of sugar). Stir, in one direction only to reduce foam, until sugar is totally dissolved then boil rapidly for 8 minutes or until the setting point is reached. If you have a preserving thermometer, it should read 104.5°C; if you don't have a thermometer, drop a little jelly onto a saucer which you have chilled in the fridge. Let the jelly cool for a minute then push it gently with your finger. If it crinkles, it has reached its setting point. Remove from the heat and skim off any scum using a slotted spoon.
5. Decant carefully into a warm jug and pour into warm, sterilised jars.

© River Cottage. Sourced from: http://www.channel4.com/food/recipes/chefs/hugh-fearnley-whittingstall/medlar-jelly-recipe_p_1.html on 20th November 2011.

In the Spring Newsletter: *Quinces in the Orchard* by Ben Pike.



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Pressing Events 2010

by Jade Bartlett

Apple pressing this year has been run differently to previous years; Orchard Link was unable to operate the presses and sell juice due to a lack of volunteers. However, even with fewer of you involved, this season's apple days have all been huge successes for the organisers and communities involved. The beautiful

September and October weather was definitely enjoyed and with a good and early crop the pressing events were well attended. Cornworthy even ran out of containers for their carefully pressed apple juice as did my own personal pressing event, which I held for neighbours.

Hiring the Orchard Link equipment and running an apple pressing day for my neighbours was one of the highlights of our year. Everyone was so grateful to have something to do with their apples it has been decided that we will

make it
a yearly
event.





I'd like to extend a big thank you to the volunteers who did donate time and energy to Orchard Link's cause. Because of you, Orchard Link was represented at most of the events and the continuation of Orchard Link's support for owners of small traditional orchards can continue. Your being at the events resulted in new members joining, as well as motivating existing members

for next time. So if you have a spare few hours next season please do get in contact with me, I can then send you details of where and how you can help and Orchard Link's work can continue.

Email me at info@orchardlink.org.uk or phone on 07792 664710.

But you don't need to wait until next year to be involved in our events. For winter is the time to plan, plant and prune. Orchard Link has built up a network of very knowledgeable and experienced Orchard professionals, who are running some fantastic events in the New Year. I hope I get to meet more of you at these. See the next few pages for event details.

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For those of you who like to do your own grafting, it has always been difficult to get hold of good quality grafting tape. Now, the Agroforestry Research Trust at Dartington are selling Parafilm tape for £7- a roll including postage. This is professional quality tape that contains enough for 300 grafts in each roll of tape. See www.agroforestry.co.uk/rootrn.html for more details.

Sunday 9th January, 2011: Planning and Planting a New Orchard

With orchard expert Adam Montague. 11am to 4pm. We will be helping The Devon Wildlife Trust (DWT) plan and plant a large orchard of traditional Devon varieties at Woodah Farm in the Teign Valley. The Trust is keen for the orchard to contain all the rare Devon varieties of apple, pear and plum. Some of these varieties are not being actively sold by any nurseries at the present time, so are still in danger of becoming extinct. In time, it is hoped that the orchard will become a demonstration orchard, where landowners can learn good orchard practice whilst managing their orchards in a wildlife-friendly manner. There is an indoor classroom. Bring lunch, waterproofs and tools if you have them. £10 (or £15 to non-members). Call Jade on 07813 819591 to book.

Saturday 22nd January, 2011: Learn to Prune Mature Apple Trees

Course instructor-orchard expert Charles Staniland. 10am - 3pm. Learn how to prune apple trees, old and young, at this hands-on day course. Wear stout boots, bring lunch, waterproofs, and secateurs or loppers if you have them. A selection of tools will be available. £10 (or £15 to non-members). Call 01364 653169 for further details and to book. Venue details to be given on booking.

Saturday 5th February, 2011: Formative Pruning of Young Apple Trees

With orchard expert Adam Montague. 11am to 4pm. Learn how to prune young apple trees or come along to brush up your skills. At the orchard at Embercombe, 'a social enterprise and charity working to inspire committed action for a truly sustainable world'. They have over 100 trees, many planted between one and eight years ago, so plenty of opportunity to try out and perfect the practical skills Adam will teach. Embercombe are cooking us a lovely hot soup and homemade bread, as well as providing tea, coffee and biscuits so no need to bring lunch. We will also have use of their hall with wood burning fire to warm up. Bring waterproofs and tools if you have them. £15 (or £20 to non-members). Call Jade on 07813 819591 to book.

Monday 14th February, 2011: Devon Wildlife Trust, Work Day.

10:00 - however long you can help for. Revisit the DWT Orchard at Woodah Farm in the Teign Valley. This will be a return visit after the planning and planting course run earlier in the year by Adam Montague. This time we will be working alongside Orchard Link's own orchard expert Ben Pike, planting more of Devon's rare variety apple, pear and plum trees. Come and fine tune the skills learnt on the planting course. Call Jade on 07813 819591 if you would like to come, so we have an idea of how many people can help.

Sunday 27th February, 2011: Lustleigh Community Orchard, Work Day.

10:00 - however long you can help for. Revisit the Lustleigh Community Orchard where we had this year's successful Annual General Meeting. Nick Hewison will lead a working group in pruning some young and ancient trees in the orchard which is a central focus for Lustleigh's community. He will be on hand to answer questions about the Orchard's varied history and the stories that come from it. "I am sure we will supplement Orchard Link volunteers with villagers to so it should be a jolly occasion!" from Nick. Call Jade on 07813 819591 as above.

Thursday 10th March, 2011: An Introduction to Bees and Honey.

A talk by Jeremy Wells, Chairman of the Totnes and Kingsbridge Beekeepers Association, Orchard Link member and long-term beekeeper. Beekeepers keep bees for a variety of reasons; as a hobby, because they have an interest in nature or to produce honey for their family; commercially, to use other hive products such as wax; and, of interest to orchard owners, for pollination. If you are interested in knowing more about these interesting and useful creatures come along for an introduction and Q&A session. Venue tbc, near Totnes. 7:30pm. Free to Orchard Link members (£3 for non-members). Call Jade on 07813 819591 to book.

AONB Orchard-related events - www.southdevonaonb.org.uk.

15th January, 2011: Trees for Food. At Underwood Discovery Centre, Beeson. 11am-4pm. Please phone 01803 732545 to book.

29th January, 2011: The Kitchen Garden in Winter. At Ash Tree Farm. 2pm - 5pm. £5. Contact Stevie Rogers for more details 01803 712437.

30th January, 2011: Nut Tree Planting. At Sharpham Estate. 12 noon - 4pm. Please phone 01803 732545 to book.

13th March, 2011: Caring for your Patch. At Lower Kellaton Farm. 2pm - 5pm. Phone 01548 511325 for more details.

27th March, 2011: The Kitchen Garden in Spring. At Ash Tree Farm. 2pm - 5pm. £5. Contact Stevie Rogers for more details 01803 712437.

Wassailing Events

Sunday 16th January - Ocombe Farm. 3.30pm - 5.30pm. Free to watch.

Saturday 15th January - Stoke Gabriel Wassail. 01803 782585.

Monday 17th January - Whimble Historical Society. www.whimble.org.

ORCHARD LINK COMMITTEE MEETINGS

All Orchard Link Members welcome to all meetings.

All meetings held at The Church House Inn, Harberton starting 7:30pm.

8th December Christmas Committee meeting. Meet for dinner 6pm.

12th January Committee Meeting

9th February Committee Meeting

9th March Committee Meeting

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Working Day Review - Making Cider at Brimblescombe Cider Makers.

On a cold sunny Saturday in November, a small but determined group of Orchard Link members and friends attended a working session at Brimblescombe's Cider at Dunsford. After turning at a chalk-scribbled sign for 'Cider' into a muddy ramshackle courtyard, the remarkable experience starts by then walking up an old, rickety-looking wooden staircase. When your eyes adjust to the dim lighting in the barn, you find yourself in a bygone world of oak barrels with the smell of apples, fermentation and sweet straw on the musty air. We were met by Ron and Bev, the cidermakers, and were given a swift introduction to the 400 year-old press and machinery. Not long after arriving, we were whisked into 'the olde cyder barn' and were soon 'scratter scraping' to our heart's content.



After an hour of work we had milled three tonnes of apples and built a tower of straw and pulp taller than any man left standing. The magical part was yet to come, as the old press creaked into action squeezing gallons of juice from the amazing feat of engineering that was Ron's apple and straw tower. To end a fantastic afternoon we were privy to sampling Brimblescombe's cider, including vintage ciders and some conditioned in old brandy and rum casks, yum! As Ben Pike rightly said "this is about as much fun as you can have with your clothes on!"

For more information about Brimblescombe Cider see their website www.brimblecombecider.co.uk or visit their shop at Farrants Farm, Dunsford, Exeter, Devon, EX6 7BA.

By Jade Bartlett

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Tamar Valley Fruit Focus, a review of the day.

by Ray Willis

The Eden Project has organised a number of whole day seminars in Cornwall to provide an insight into issues and new developments for fruit and nut production. The most recent seminar was held in October at Calstock in partnership with the Tamar Valley AONB and included an impressive list of presenters.

The event commenced with a presentation by Tim Selman, the Tamar Valley AONB Manager. Tim explained the background to fruit growing in the Tamar Valley and how at one time the whole valley had been cultivated for fruit, vegetables and flowers.

James Crowden, a South West-based historian and author, presented a history of fruit growing and cider making in the Tamar Valley. The Tamar Valley climate is perfect for fruit growing, and at one time, so intensive were the orchards that spring blossom would be blown by the wind across the Tamar as if it were snow. The trees were often rented out to 'graters' who would harvest and market the fruit. Three times a week boats would sail down the Tamar to market the fruit at Devonport. Other than apples, important products from the valley were plums, cherries, almonds, olives and apricots. Returning to the present, James referred to the recent revival in cider making and how 'cider has now come back from the bus shelter'. James has authored a definitive book on cider entitled 'Ciderland'.

Stéphanie Hudin, a scientific officer with the French Loire Team of Fédération des Conservatoires d'Espaces Naturels prepared a presentation, given on her behalf. Stéphanie is also an active member of the Breton Apple Society, "Les Mordus de la Pomme" ("The Crunch of the Apple").

The presentation described orchard activities in the town of Quévert near

Dinan in Brittany. In February each year, there is an apple grafting fair (La Foire aux Greffons) in Quévert where grafting wood is exchanged. There are rows of grafting wood with information on the varieties, rootstocks can be purchased and expert advice is on hand.

In a 'soapbox' session, Ben Pike described how Orchard Link was established to encourage the conservation, restoration and planting of orchards and how our web-based Harvest Line facilitates contact between orchard owners and juice and cider producers.

Other presenters included, Orchard Live, Tamar and Tavy Orchard Group, RHS, Transition Town Totnes and Tamar Valley Orchard Volunteer Group.

Feli Fernandez from the East Malling Research presented a highly technical paper on the development of DNA profiling or genetic fingerprinting of trees. DNA is the molecule that carries the genetic information used in the development and function of all living organisms. Alternatively, this can be thought of as a set of blueprints containing all of the instructions to build, for example, an apple tree. DNA techniques are used to confirm the pedigree of new varieties and improved lines in breeding programmes. DNA is assisting with the management of the UK National Fruit Collection kept at Brogdale in Kent. It allows the detection of varieties known by different names, but which being genetically identical, are in effect duplicates. Forensic DNA fingerprinting has also been used to confirm where incorrect varieties have been supplied or trees supplied on incorrect rootstocks.

Robert Fovargue, a top fruit specialist, explained commercial aspects of fruit growing, especially cherries. Commercially, cherries are grown on Gisela 5 or 6 rootstocks to be easily managed. Producing cherries in Somerset is a challenge with the many threats from rain (causes splitting), hail, frost, cold winds (can cause fruits to drop), high winds, poor pollination, birds (nets are essential), deer, rabbits and badgers. Other issues to consider are drainage (poor drainage can cause root rot), soil structure, nutrient balance and pests and diseases. Robert uses the minimum of spraying but considered it commercially impracticable to grow cherries organically. For apple trees these are grown commercially on M9 rootstocks and seaweed is an excellent foliar feed.

The event was concluded with brief presentations from Keith Goverd on fruit juices and from the Brogdale fruit collection curator who explained the information available on varieties and included on the website www.nationalfruitcollection.org.uk.

Future similar events are proposed by the Eden Project and details will be emailed to Orchard Link members as soon as these are received.

As varied and delicious as the fruit our orchard's bear are the stories, traditions, myths, folklore, songs and magic associated with these important places. Many of these tales and legends reveal a mystical time of superstition and ritual, embracing the growing and subsequent harvest of our orchard fruit. None featured quite as much, or as auspiciously as, the humble apple. This folklore demonstrates the importance of the harvest and how superstition played a part in rural England's past and present.

The principal ritual performed concerning apple harvests in the UK, and especially in Devon, is Wassailing. How far the tradition of Wassailing dates back, is in much debate, but it has been linked to Germanic, Norse and Anglo Saxon Pagan rituals. This goes to show that Wassailing is not only a good excuse for a party, but that people believed (and some still do) that by performing this ritual their trees would be more productive in the coming year.

The Oxford English Dictionary says that 'Wassail' is from the Old Norse 'Ves heill', meaning 'Be In Good Health' and corresponds to the Old English salutation 'Wes Hal'. The dictionary also tells us that Wassail was used to describe 'a carousal, riotous festivity, revelling' dating to 1650 and that in 1895 the tradition of 'Wassailing the apple trees' is documented. A clue as to why the festivities were so 'riotous' is that Wassail is also the name given to 'the liquor in which healths were drunk, especially spiced ale'. In 1661 there is evidence that people were performing 'a custom formerly observed on Twelfth-night of drinking healths from the Wassailing bowl' (1).

Twelfth-night according to the old-Julian calendar would today, fall on January 17th. In 1752, some calendar days were dropped in order to realign the calendar with the equinox, therefore, Christmas would have fallen 12 days after December 25th. Many people still use this date to perform their Wassailing ceremonies and ignore the modern Gregorian calendar where twelfth night is the 5th January.

There are two main kinds of wassailing that go on around the UK. Jackie Sarsby discusses this in her article written for the Orchard Link's Winter 2005 Newsletter. 'In Gloucestershire and other counties, a group of men, often farm workers, carried a wassail bowl around the big houses in the village or town, expecting to have it filled with either spiced ale or cider...' in return for wishes of good health 'Wes Hal'.

I am more interested in the Devon custom of 'Wassailing the apple trees' in a fertility ritual encouraging good crops. 'In the South- Hams of Devonshire on the Eve of the Epiphany, the farmer attended by his workmen goes to the orchard with a large pitcher of cyder' wrote Alphonso in a letter to The Gentleman's Magazine in 1791(2). Robert Herrick, the 17th Century Poet wrote of a drink called "Lambs Wool" made of mulled cider, sugar, nutmeg and ginger used in Wassailing ceremonies(3). Some accounts add roasted

apples to this brew too. Once in the orchard with a pitcher of 'Lambs Wool', 'encircling one of the best bearing trees, they drink the following toast three times:

*Here's to thee, old apple tree,
Whence thou may'st bud, and whence thou may'st blow!
And whence thou may'st bear apples enow!
Hatsfull! Capsfull!
Bushel-bushel-sacs full,
And my pockets full too! Huzza!*

Some are so superstitious as to believe that if they neglect this custom the trees will bear no apples that year,' explains Alphonso. After the toast, the party would fill their earthen ware mugs from the 'Wassail Bowl', drink to the tree's health and then throw some cider at the tree or to it's roots. Beaumont writes in the 1920's book *Proceedings*(4) about the symbolic significance of this ritual; the blood of the apple tree (cider made from the juice of the apples) is returned to the tree at the dead of winter to revive it for the coming year so that it will 'once more blossom and bear fruit.' A piece of cider soaked toast is then left in a fork of the tree to encourage the robin, who eats the pests (or some say, for the tree-god). The final act is to wake the tree up with loud noise. Guns are fired and a general commotion is created by banging saucepan lids and any other improvised percussion 'instruments'. This is to wake up the tree ready for the next crop.

I hope your trees observe your Wassails and I look forward to hearing a rumpus noise on January the 17th as South Devon's Traditional Orchards are awoken to 2011 by enthusiastic Orchard Link Members.

1. *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, 1993 edition.
2. Letter by Alphonso, March 1791, in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, Vol. 61, Part 1, P.405: <http://books.google.co.uk/books>. Search *The Gentleman's Magazine* South-Hams.
3. Robert Herrick, *Twelfth Night*, 1648. <http://www.readbookonline.net/readOnline/6161/>
4. Beaumont, *The Apple Tree Wassail*, A survival of a tree cult. 1920. www.archive.org/stream/proceedings42dorsuoft#page/56/mode/2up

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Having been involved with advising hundreds of fruit tree growers over the last 15 years, I have only come across one person who regularly sprays their trees. I completely understand people's reluctance to spray fruit trees; it is not only time consuming and expensive, but it sits uncomfortably with many people who prefer to grow their fruit in a natural way. At the recent South West Fruit Focus event held at Calstock, Robert Fovargue, a knowledgeable speaker and top fruit advisor from Pearce Seeds, said that it was necessary to spray apple trees to provide protection against scab. This is, perhaps, symptomatic of the commercial fruit industry, who aim to protect the more common nationally-known varieties against scab. To my mind, spraying against scab is completely unnecessary if the right varieties are chosen in the first place. There are many wonderful apple varieties that will grow quite happily, even in our damp climate, with hardly a trace of scab. They may not be suitable for commercial apple cultivation, but are wonderful in a garden orchard. Rosemary Russet, Winston and Newton Wonder are all good examples.

Robert also mentioned spraying fruit trees with seaweed. Seaweed contains very little of the NPK nutrients normally found in fertilisers, but does contain large amounts of all the trace elements and minerals that are important for plant growth. It also contains hormones, such as cytokinins, that have an important effect on the regulation of plant growth. Many claims have been made for the effect of seaweeds including increased bud and fruit production, a reduction in fungal disease, and resistance to stressful conditions and frost. I searched on the internet to find any hard evidence to meet these claims and found very little, probably because few people are willing to pay for such research.

The only true scientific study, reprinted from 'The International Journal of Fruit Science', found that seaweed, sprayed five times during the growing season, "stimulated the growth of shoots and leaves, caused an improvement in flower quality and prolonged the blooming time..." (1) There was also evidence to show that seaweed sprays "sometimes improved the fruit set and the size of apples..."

If such results are true, then seaweed would seem to be a very worthwhile method of boosting fruit production and improving the health of fruit trees. Other studies, albeit with less rigorous science, have suggested ameliorative effects on problems such as red spider mite and powdery mildew. A seaweed preparation is now sold to be used as a wound paint to provide protection from fungal diseases.

You can, of course, collect your own seaweed and make your own sprays, but do be aware that seaweed on the beach is the property of the beach owner, so permission is needed to take it away.

1. *Effect of Preharvest Treatment with Seaweed Products, Kelpak and Goemar BM86 on Fruit Quality in Apple* by Alina Basak. International Journal of Fruit Science Oct 2008

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HAVE YOUR SAY . . .

Lloyd Watts - would it make any sense to have a "retired member" class for say £5 a year who would just get emails and newsletters and if came to events would pay as a non-member. *Committee response:* With the election of a new membership secretary we have postponed this for discussion in the new-year.

Jackie Stephens - at the AGM - could meetings be on various days of week (she has a conflict on Wednesday evenings and others may have similar). *Committee Response:* Committee Members had other commitments and on conclusion of discussion it was considered that Wednesdays were probably the most convenient for current committee. If there is more support for a different day or at different location please email Jade on info@orchardlink.org.uk and the committee will discuss this again.

EDITOR'S NOTES

by Jade Bartlett

Message from George Arnison: 'Apologies to anyone who has had trouble getting through to Orchard Link press hire towards the end of the press hiring season. My landline and therefore internet connection were down for a period. However, normal service has now resumed.'

And a message from Jade Bartlett: 'Thank you for getting to the end of my first Newsletter. I hope you have found it as informative and entertaining as Tony's Newsletters before. If you have any topics you would like to see covered or questions you would like answered, please let us know.

My co-ordinating role of the Newsletter is temporary and we are looking for someone to take over putting together this important piece of communication. We send out three newsletters a year and have lots of contributors. Although I am happy to continue sourcing and writing articles I need help pulling it together. If we don't find someone to help there is a real chance you won't receive another Newsletter.

Please come forward.'

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You can contact **ORCHARD LINK** at:
Orchard Link, P.O. Box 109, Totnes, TQ9 5XR
phone 07792 664710 email info@orchardlink.org.uk
www.orchardlink.org.uk

To enquire about the hire of apple mills, presses and pasteurisers contact:
George Arnison on 01752 895034

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