



ENGLISH HERITAGE

Landscape Advice Note: Fruit and Historic Sites



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Many historic sites have a long tradition of growing fruit. This Landscape Advice aims to outline the benefits that can be obtained through fruit production and how this can be incorporated into the management of a historic site.

INTRODUCTION

Many historic sites have fruit trees and other fruit plants. Fruit growing was an important part of a household's or community's food supply and economy. Some sites may have fruit trees that are over 100 years old. At some sites the fruit is cultivated both on the walls and within the garden. Older trees require careful management to prolong their life, their aesthetic, fruiting, and their wildlife value.

There has been a dramatic decline in the area of commercial orchards within the UK. There is little scope for the cultivation of large trees with their higher labour requirements and lower yields. Only about 7,000 hectares survive.

VALUE OF FRUIT

There are several important reasons to maintain the stock of fruit at historic sites:

- As heritage assets relating to the history of the site and its cultivation, and new plantings can provide continuity in this respect
- The aesthetic value of orchards and fruit
- The skills involved in growing, training and cropping fruit
- The biodiversity value of orchards and veteran trees
- An educational resource
- Features of visitor interest, and opportunities to host events such as 'Apple Days' and sale of fruit

NEW PLANTINGS

New plantings should be informed by historic research. The archives may reveal orders, bills, correspondence, planting plans and so on; and on site labels and training wires may be found. Sometimes there is also the opportunity to create more contemporary plantings that use historical evidence as a starting point for example the walled kitchen garden at Osborne House.

IMPORTANT SITE FACTORS FOR EXISTING AND NEW PLANTINGS

There are a number of site factors to consider:

- Temperature

Temperature generally decreases with altitude and at higher latitudes and in the north there will be less growing days than lower ground or southerly sites. Local topographical features and river systems can also create differences in local climate. Apples produce satisfactory yields in most lowland areas of the country. Although old pear trees can be found at many localities, they crop less well in the north than the south. Sweet cherries are less tolerant of cooler conditions than Sour cherries. Within kitchen gardens, north facing walls are normally cooler, and where fruit is to be wall grown, the most suitable crop is Sour cherries. Impeded air drainage from a site can lead to low night temperatures and these frost pockets can reduce fruit setting.

- Rainfall

Seasonal and annual rainfall vary considerably with location. Wet sites can increase disease incidence in some fruits, for example Apple scab. Root rots are often associated with poor drainage.

- Soils

Soils for temperate fruits should be well drained and provide adequate nutrition. Most crops will make best growth at pH 6.5 to 7.0.

- Light

Light is important for growth and cropping. Performance is likely to be poor where fruit is grown in small walled areas with low light levels.

- Historic fabric

Advice should be sought about the potential archaeological interest of the site when planning to plant fruit trees. The new trees will need to be planted to allow for future growth. Surviving historic features such as labels, wires and vine eyes are likely to be of historic interest and should be retained. New wall fixing points for wire supports should only be made in the wall joints.

01



02



FRONT COVER

Pear tree in the Kitchen Garden at Audley End House © English Heritage Photo Library

IMAGE 01

At Osborne House the kitchen garden has been created using contemporary plantings based on historical evidence © English Heritage Photo Library

IMAGE 02

Espalier trees in the Audley End House Kitchen Garden © Marianne Majerus/ English Heritage Photo Library

PRINCIPLES OF CULTIVATION

With new plantings, plan well ahead and consider the level of skilled staff likely to be available before planting fruits that require detailed training and pruning, or those that are marginally hardy.

Apricots, peaches, nectarines and figs need to grow against the warmest walls, or under glass. Figs will require their root system to be contained in an enclosed pit of concrete and rubble, to reduce their vigour. Vines are unlikely to crop consistently well at cooler and wetter sites.

Soil analysis should be carried out to determine nutritional requirements prior to planting, and in some cases for established trees. Lime levels in the soil adjacent to old walls may be high where lime mortar is used. High pH can lead to poor growth and cropping in many fruit crops.

Practically all tree fruits are grown on rootstocks which influence their vigour and cropping. Where possible, trees on dwarfing rootstocks are grown for wall training, and those on vigorous rootstocks grown as free standing orchard trees.

Apples, pears, plums and cherries require insect pollination from one or more cultivars of the same tree if they are to produce satisfactory yields. It is important to choose cultivars that have overlapping flowering for pollination. Exposure to wind and cold during flowering can reduce fruit set. Solitary old trees within a site, may be aesthetically pleasing but are unlikely to produce regular crops.

Weed competition (including grass), is likely to reduce vigour in young trees and soft fruit. Older traditionally grown trees can grow quite satisfactorily within areas of turf or meadows. Control of weeds should be by physical soil cultivation, or by mulching, or approved herbicides.

It is probably best to exclude fruit trees within and adjacent to car parking areas, as fallen fruit can be unsightly and possibly create slippery surfaces.

MANAGEMENT AND MAINTENANCE

Careful planning is necessary when considering fruit cultivation at a historic site even if only a few trees are to be grown. The display should add to the visitor experience. The fruit and its cultivation needs to be included within the management plan including a written schedule of required operations to be carried out annually and timings.

Fruit training and growing is a specialist task and it may be necessary to buy-in expertise to train in-house

staff. Neglected traditional trees may require advice and renovation from a specialist arboriculturist, or other expert in the field of fruit growing.

Natural England has published a series of Technical Information Notes on orchards including advice on pruning and restoring neglected orchards.

FRUIT IDENTIFICATION

Some older fruit trees on historic trees will be unnamed. Apples are easier to identify than other fruit crops. An identification service is available from Brogdale Collections or the Royal Horticultural Society.

TREE PRESERVATION ORDERS

Fruit trees can be protected by Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs). Hedges, bushes and shrubs are exempt from TPO protection. Fruit trees covered by TPOs may be pruned in accordance with good horticultural practice. Trees forming part of a commercial orchard may be cut down. In this case consent is not needed from the controlling local authority.

FINANCIAL AND OTHER SUPPORT FOR TRADITIONAL ORCHARDS

Sites may be able to receive funding through Defra agri-environment schemes to help with the management costs of maintaining traditional orchards. Some wildlife groups support traditional orchard planting and management as part of local habitat action plans. Other groups such as Common Ground and the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England also provide advice.

National and local apple days are organised each October throughout the country and historic sites could participate.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Arbury, J and Pinhey, S 1997 *Pears*. Maidstone: Wells & Winter

Bagenal, N B 1939 *Fruit Growing*. London: Ward, Lock & Co. Ltd

Brogdale Collections
www.brogdalecollections.co.uk/fruit-identification.html

Bunyard, E A 1920 *Handbook of Hardy Fruits*. London: J. Murray

Bultitude, J 1983 *Apples – A guide to the Identification of International Varieties*. London: Macmillan

Campaign for the Protection of Rural England
www.cpre.org.uk

Common Ground and Apple Day
www.commonground.org.uk/projects/orchards/apple-day

Forestry Commission
www.forestry.gov.uk

Morgan, J and Richards, A 2002 *The New Book of Apples*. London: Ebury

National Fruit Collection
www.nationalfruitcollection.org.uk

Natural England - Various Technical Information
Notes on traditional orchards, and web pages on agri-environment schemes
www.naturalengland.org.uk

Orchard Network
www.orchardnetwork.org.uk

Royal Horticultural Society
www.rhs.org.uk

Roach, F A 1985 *Cultivated Fruits of Britain : Their Origins and History*. Oxford: Blackwell

Walled Kitchen Garden Network
www.wkgn.net

Watkins, J and Wright, T (eds) 2007 *The Management & Maintenance of Historic Parks, Gardens & Landscapes: The English Heritage Handbook*. London: Frances Lincoln, 205-209



IMAGE 03

Espalier apple trees in the Audley End House Kitchen Garden © Marianne Majerus/English Heritage Photo Library

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