

## How to get the local community involved in your orchard...and create long lasting beneficial links

### Introduction

One of the main benefits of a community orchard is creation of new valuable connections with your local community and the strengthening of existing ones. Providing a welcoming space where people can come together to learn, develop, create, share and celebrate, can be a powerful experience in community building. Just as the creation of an orchard instantly increases and diversifies the biological community, through habitat creation and the addition of new plants, it can do the same for the human community.

By making your orchard accessible and welcoming to others by coordinating seasonal events, you will help to ensure its long term sustainability; the more people invested in the space, the more chance the orchard will be cared for and valued for the long term. "The key is to organise activities that will draw in people with different interests and skills at different times" ...Common Ground, Community Orchards Handbook.

Food is a great way to connect people and a 'free lunch' really does draw people in. Everyone has a connection with food, and fruit seems to have

universal appeal. Bringing people together to harvest the fruit, share recipes and customs, and of course eat and drink together, is often a great way to get people to events and provides the opportunities for bonds to be made.



### Types of Community events

The seasonal nature of orcharding tasks lends itself to year round community activities. Here are just a few ideas:

**Wassailing** is an ancient tradition aimed at 'blessing' the trees as they sleep in the winter, encouraging an abundant harvest later in the year. The word Wassail means 'to be healthy' and it was cheered loudly while the people shared hot cider from a wassail bowl, making as much noise as

possible to 'wake the trees' from their winter dormancy. Traditionally it was held on the '12th night' in January, but today orchard groups tend to wassail anytime during the winter months. Hot juice and/or cider and a bonfire help to make this a popular winter warmer!

**Apple Day & harvest events.** Apple Day is a national event that is held on October 21st. It was started by the charity Common Ground and aims to celebrate 'local distinctiveness', encouraging people to learn about fruit varieties and customs local to their area. At this time of the year apples and pears are plentiful, providing fruit for all manner of fun activities and tasty treats! Often groups tie the wassail in with seasonal orchard activities such as planting and pruning.

**Blossom Events.** Spring is one of the most beautiful and exciting times of year in the orchard with the bountiful, bright blossom buzzing with happy bees! Take advantage of the sights, sounds and smells of this time by putting on blossom celebrations. Tie this in with seasonal orchard tasks such as mulching and feeding, or creating pollinator-friendly habitats such as bug hotels.

**Summer Picnics.** Invite people into the orchard at the height of summer to share food together in the sun, or under the cool shade of the trees! Plan your picnic around the harvest of any

plums, gages, cherries, mulberries and early apples in your orchard. Make 'fruit kebabs' with summer fruits. This could be tied in with watering and summer pruning tasks.

### Getting people to your event

In order to get people to attend your event you must make it attractive to a range of people, so that they will want to come. Providing fun family activities as well as useful 'services' such as apple identification or some sort of training can help to lure people in. And, of course, food is always a draw!



Many of the traditional orchard 'events' are seasonal and offer opportunities for engagement year after year. Often groups enjoy their first event, such as an Apple Day, so much that it becomes an annual event that evolves year on year, becoming more interesting and diverse as the group gains confidence and experience.



**These are a few ways to get people through the doors:**

- Offer the chance for other local environmental/community/food organisations/groups/charities to hold stalls to showcase their work
- Apple ID – have an apple ID expert on a stall and invite the public to bring their apples in to identify. This will appeal to those who have apple trees, or know someone who does, but have no idea which variety is growing. Contact the orchard network for ID experts <https://ptes.org/campaigns/traditional-orchard-project/orchard-network/>
- Music – invite local singer/song-writers, rappers or bands to come and perform at the event. Depending on the location, acoustic may be the best bet as you won't need to worry about power supply
- Food and drink - Always a winner in terms of tempting people in. BBQ, baked stuff, apple juice...there are many options. Free is good, but obviously this depends on budget. It's always worth contacting local supermarkets/wholesale retailers to ask for food donations. There are a number of organisations like 'The real junk food company' who take food that would otherwise go to waste and cook it up into delicious vegetarian feasts on a donation basis. <http://therealjunkfoodproject.org/>



**Promoting your event**

In order to focus your energy and resources to make them as effective and efficient as they can be, it is worth spending some time carrying out a 'community mapping' exercise. This can be a useful and interesting activity to undergo with your orchard group and can highlight many previously unknown and useful links. View a blog about community mapping by the Orchard Project here: <https://www.theorchardproject.org.uk/blog/community-mapping/>.

**Here are some suggestions on who to promote your event to:**

- Local gardening, allotment, horticultural & permaculture groups
- Local plant or tree nursery



- Local beekeepers
- Local veg box schemes
- Community gardens, allotments, local volunteer groups (TCV/Green Gym)
- Regional Wildlife Trusts
- RSPB
- Mayor & local dignitaries



- Neighbours of the YMCA
- Local press
- Area experts
- Schools, colleges, university environmental & conservation student groups
- If you've managed to find a good local tree nursery from where you'll be buying stock, invite them along. This may result in strengthened relationship - freebies, discounts, free training etc.

- Local harvest groups (research the 'Abundance') and ask them to come and run apple juicing or other related activities. They may know where to borrow an apple press.
- Neighbours and friends – use the good old fashioned method of door to door knocking with fliers. Sometimes the simplest tried and tested methods are the best. A face to face invite can really work wonders – neighbours may appreciate the effort and be more inclined to attend if they already know a familiar face. All sorts of benefits can come out of such interactions; offers of help/volunteering, free fruit from the trees in their garden etc.

#### How to successfully promote the event:

- Design posters and leaflets and put them up in shops, libraries, community centres and letter boxes. Please use the template provided.
- Do a press release to advertise your local event in the local papers (Please use the template provided)
- Use social media – especially Facebook – to promote your event. Set up a Facebook event people can share and say they are coming on. Use Facebook paid advertising to promote your event to local



people with an interest in orchards, allotments, community food etc.

- Ask partner organisations to spread the word through their networks, especially those with a good local reach.

Get in touch with local CVS / volunteer centres and council departments working in the area

- Attend local events and speak with people face-to-face or perhaps hold a little stall. This builds good will with partners by supporting their events

**TOP TIP: if you are concerned about too many people showing up at your event you can use Eventbrite or similar free ticket booking sites to limit the number of people attending events. Whether a wassail, training, or volunteer event, sometimes it can be useful to limit the number of participants due to resource/budget limitations or optimal 'teaching' numbers.**

### Activity ideas for community events in your orchard

Here are some tried and tested ideas for activities to run at your orchard event. These could either be free or for a nominal fee to help cover costs (or a combination).

- ✓ **Face painting:** A great one for the kids. It's worth looking up a local



artist who does face painting as faces are a very particular medium to work with! Fruit/orchard themes go down well...

- ✓ **Apple juicing:** This is a really popular activity that is often the highlight of orchard/fruit events. It does however require some specialised (yet easy to use) equipment and a large number of apples.



The principle equipment consists of an apple press and a 'scratter' or mill to crush the apples up into a pulp before the juice is squeezed out by the press. When choosing where to buy these look at good quality, reasonable price and their ongoing customer service after the purchase. If you plan to use your orchard produce to make juice, cider vinegar or cider then this equipment would be money well spent; an investment that will last a lifetime with care.

If you can't afford this, there may be other options; contact local fruit groups such as Abundance Network to see if you can borrow or rent the kit; invite a local group who has the kit to come and run the juicing at your event; get together with some other

local fruit groups to share the costs and share the use; ask a local company to fund the kit. It takes lots of apples to keep making juice all day. You'll need as many as you can get your hands on. Try contacting local fruit wholesalers, markets and supermarkets for donations. One option is to ask people to bring in apples from their trees to juice, giving them a bottle to take away (it will have to be drunk in a few days unless it is pasteurised). Here are a couple of guides on how to juice safely:

[http://www.vigopresses.co.uk/files//451b6965-15fb-481f-baaa-a51b00fa3419/Juice\\_Making\\_.pdf](http://www.vigopresses.co.uk/files//451b6965-15fb-481f-baaa-a51b00fa3419/Juice_Making_.pdf)

<https://youtu.be/pazW2pEG18U>

- ✓ **Apple Bobbing:** This game has stood the test of time: it may have been brought to these shores by the Romans! Fun for all ages, it's amazing to see just how competitive people (especially adults) can get! For reasons of hygiene, it is advisable to change the water frequently and of course not to let anyone with a cold/illness



participate - some people add a few drops of Milton's cleaning fluid to reduce the risk of spreading germs.



- ✓ **Apple juice tasting sessions:** This is a popular activity that can be done anywhere with any age group. Different apple varieties produce juices of differing sweetness and sharpness. By allowing people to try a sweet, medium and sharp juice from single varieties you can raise appreciation of the range of apple varieties and their qualities. For example James White <http://www.jameswhite.co.uk> or Duskin juices <http://www.duskin.co.uk/> are two readily available juices that can be bought in one litre bottles from a range of independent shops including health food shops. You can run the session in the format of a wine-tasting session, talking about the different varieties and then asking participants to take in the aroma, before swilling the juice in the mouth and then swallowing. Learn about and then use terms such as 'palate', 'nose' and 'finish' for maximum effect! You'll need some disposable cups. The same can be done with real cider if appropriate. The Orchard Project has run many popular real cider tasting sessions, led by local cider aficionado and North London CAMRA cider representative, Ian White.

- ✓ **Longest peel competition:** This is a popular game that is enjoyed by all ages. The aim is for a contender to produce the longest, intact apple peel possible from a single fruit.



Traditionally this would be done using a peeling knife but a safer option is using an apple peeler & corer, which you can easily get online. This efficient little machine is easy to use, results in extremely long peel 'ribbons' (frequently over 1m long depending on the apple size!), and has the added benefit of simply amazing the children – they love it! Each contender gets one shot with one apple. They then take their longest intact peel, measure it, and attach their name and length (on a small piece of paper and a paper clip) which is then attached to a horizontally hung length of string.

- ✓ **Apple 'nogging':** A slightly different take on bobbing, nogging involves hanging apples on strings in a line from a horizontal line, such as a washing line ties between two trees. Participants must try to eat the apple without using their hands. Hanging the apples at different heights allows people of different heights to participate.



- ✓ **Apple art:** Apples can be sliced in half and dipped in paint to make attractive prints. They can also be carved into all sorts of interesting faces (see above). Of course, bark and leaf rubbing is also an easy and popular activity to run.

- ✓ **Apple bird feeders:** By sticking the pointed edge of sunflower seeds into the skin of an apple, a simple bird feeder can be made. The apple can then be taken away and hung on a string. The seeds can be positioned in attractive patterns.

- ✓ **Orchard skills share workshop:** Providing some practical learning opportunities is a great way to draw people in, while spreading skills that are useful for the development of the orchard. This could be led by a local expert, group, or simply someone who is keen to share a particular skill and area of knowledge. Popular workshops at orchard events include: grafting (season-specific), fruit tree pest & diseases, beekeeping, wild food walk, making something physical and beneficial for the orchard or for people to take away e.g. bird boxes, bug hotels.

- ✓ **Cooking, baking or preserving workshop with a local chef/enthusiast:**

- For example, the Orchard Project (TOP) teamed up with fruit loving French chef Jean Jacques at some of their London Apple Days. He showed people how to produce a variety of naturally flavoured and coloured apple



compotes, created with a couple of pans and a simple two-hob camping stove. The workshops were a hit!

- Organise a cooking/baking competition, your own version of the Great British Bake off? For example organise an apple pie baking competition at your next wassail event. People are keen to show off their skills. Nominate a panel of residents, staff, local bigwigs to judge the entries etc.



- ✓ **Foraging walk:** Why not invite a local naturalist or forager to come and deliver a talk or walk at, or around, your orchard site. These are very popular and tie food and nature together nicely.

This is just a small selection of ideas that have worked well for orchard events across the UK. For more ideas on fun activities see Common Ground's 'Apple Games and Customs' <https://www.commonground.org.uk/shop/apple-games-customs/>

**TOP TIP: Arrange for a photographer to take pictures at your event. This could be a pro, or a community member who's handy with a camera.**



**Good photos are a great way to communicate the story of your orchard and are useful for promotional materials in the future.**

### Volunteering opportunities



Every YMCA/Foyer orchard group should develop an orchard management plan which lays out the long term maintenance and development of the orchard, listing who will do what and when. As well as being an invaluable tool to guide orchard development and maintenance, this highlights where there is scope to include volunteers at different stages throughout the orchard's future. Having regular volunteer events will allow people to make lasting bonds with the orchard whilst keeping the orchard 'open' to new volunteers. Split volunteering opportunities into events that need many people doing 'bulky' work, or fewer doing more specialised tasks. Thought should go into how many

people are required for tasks and when they are needed.

Please look at the orchard calendar here which can help you plan volunteering needs:

<http://www.fruitfullcommunities.org/pdf/1489926957Care-guide-for-newly-planted-trees-FINAL.pdf>

- Aim to build relationships with other local organisations that could take joint responsibility for some of the orcharding tasks e.g. a local school to come and do the watering; the local green gym to help deliver mulch; the local eco-therapy group to do weeding etc.
- Also, if appropriate, offer the orchard up as an outdoor event space and promote it to local organisations as a space they can 'book' for their events – picnics, yoga, meditation, story-telling, music, etc. As the space develops, there may be more ways in which it could be used.
- It is worth being clear about responsibilities here. It's vital that you make sure that groups attend with relevant supervision, in particular when working with young and/or vulnerable people.
- Set up a newsletter/poster/email laying out the opportunities in the year ahead – providing all the dates together in one place nice and early gives people lots of notice. Individual events can be promoted individually in the run up to each one.

- Take a clipboard or tablet to other local events so that you can talk about the orchard/your events and take peoples contact details. You can also collect contact details when people attend your own events. It can be useful with tasking one person with this job during events. Forming a database of potential volunteers will be invaluable for building up support.



- Outreach projects. Outreach projects help people to develop a more involved connection with your orchard than one-off events. Think first about who you want to engage and plan projects that match their interests and abilities. Some community orchards have



worked with groups of adults with learning difficulties, or schools, for example, to undertake regular tasks throughout the orchard year.

- There are many organisations who match volunteers with work. Ideally, the focus should be on local connections. Organisations such as Project Dirt have been doing this effectively, and it is also worth contacting your local authority to see if they can link you to relevant groups. For days where lots of people are required, contact local Universities, the local 'Green Gym' or look into local corporate volunteer schemes.

