

Wider application

Community orchards can be successful in both urban and rural areas. They help renew public interest in fruit growing, whilst providing opportunities for sharing knowledge and skills. Community orchards can enhance housing estates, industrial estates and hospitals, whilst school orchards can underpin work in several areas of the curriculum. There are also health benefits in making fresh fruit more easily available.

Much of the success of a community orchard lies in the strength of public commitment. Local people are the key to running the orchard and deciding how it is used. Community orchards do not generally have economic fruit production as their main goal, but they can help to pay for themselves through the sale of fruit. Other products may also include hay, wild flower seed and mistletoe. In the very long term apple, pear, cherry and walnut wood could generate some income. Traditional orchards of standard trees with unimproved grassland are also widely acknowledged to be of high wildlife value.

Further information

This leaflet is one of a series produced by the National Urban Forestry Unit. NUFU provides a national focus for the exchange of information and good practice in urban forestry.

If you would like further information on other case studies or their application, or if you have examples of good practice to share with others, please contact:

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Common Ground is a national charity which promotes practical linkotacSeeln theartrs,thepitgle, co sevnatios

Community orchards in towns

Introduction

Orchards were a traditional feature of most communities in the past. They are both attractive and productive and, thanks to annual events such as *Apple Day* and the increasing interest in locally grown food, community orchards are again becoming popular.

At least 6000 varieties of apple have been grown in Britain. By planting new orchards, local people can help to keep tradition alive, enhance their local environment, develop new skills and have the pleasure of eating home grown fruit.

Specific example

Project name and location

BLONDIN ORCHARD, Blondin Nature Area, Boston Manor Road, Northfields, **LONDON**

Grid reference: TQ 167 787

Project partners

- London Borough of Ealing Parks and Countryside Service
- London Ecology Unit
- Friends of Blondin Nature Area
- Common Ground

Project objectives

- To establish a successful community orchard with good fruit production
- To develop the area through ongoing consultation with local people
- To bring a redundant allotment back into active and sustainable community use
- To enhance the area's value for wildlife

Site description

Blondin Orchard covers about 0.5ha of a 2 ha allotment site and is bordered by housing and a recreation ground. It originally formed part of a private family estate, but the area has been owned by the London Borough of Ealing since 1926. From 1750 to 1834 it formed part of the Brentford Nursery, which specialised in fruit trees and listed over 300 apple varieties.

The whole area is named after Charles Blondin, the nineteenth century French tightrope walker, famous for traversing the Niagara Falls. Upon retirement, Blondin settled locally and his feats (and a couple of apple varieties) are celebrated in local street names.



Young orchard tree protected by temporary fencing during establishment

The Blondin Nature Area, including the orchard, is enclosed by security fencing. There are two locked gates which provide vehicular access for mowers. Pedestrians have access via a stile from the recreation ground. The council is currently working with local residents to improve access. The nature area is patrolled by rangers from the London Borough of Ealing Parks and Countryside Service once a week, but local people keep an eye on the area and report litter and any incidence of vandalism. This local surveillance system is being encouraged by the council and is a common feature of many urban community orchards.

Project design

When cultivation of the municipal allotments declined, the council asked local people for ideas which would keep this area in community use. Over 150 people expressed their opinions and the consensus was for a community orchard within a natural setting.

Designs were drawn up by the council, in consultation with residents. Many of the fruit varieties subsequently planted in the orchard were known to have been grown locally during the time of the Brentford Nursery.

Planting and establishment

The orchard was planted on 19 February 1997 to commemorate the centenary of Blondin's death. Fifty local people helped to plant 46 apple trees. The trees were planted 4-5 metres apart, and were 1.2m high at time of planting and grafted onto a semi-dwarfing rootstock (*MM106*).

The individual orchard trees were protected with posts and chestnut paling fencing against vandalism and mower damage. A few trees were lost to vandals before they were guarded, but these were all replaced and none have been wilfully damaged since. The protection will be removed once the trees are well established.

Management

The grass in the orchard is mown twice a year by the council. Local residents keep a 1m² area around each tree free from weeds, and a standpipe allows the young trees to be watered

A longer term management plan for the orchard and nature area is being drawn up by the local authority and the Friends of Blondin Nature Area. The plan includes ideas for fruit production, links with schools, skills training, grazing of the orchard by sheep and the provision of seating. The orchard may be expanded to take in many of the existing cherry trees which grow within the nature area.

The establishment of a Friends Group with more than 50 members has led to strong local support for the project, including monthly work parties and seasonal activities.

Results

By the summer of 1999, the trees had produced their first crop.

Local people recognise the benefits of the orchard to the local environment and they are beginning to consider new opportunities for its social use.



Apple bobbing - traditional at Halloween and on Apple Day

