

Orchard news

Wintertime is probably the most important for orchard management. Though the tasks are few in number, they are critical for a successful crop and healthy trees. So a visit to the orchard is a worthy venture and well worth the muddy boots, cold feet, goose bumps, and a little mild frostbite. As any well-read fruit tree would ask, what good is the warmth of summer, without the cold of winter to give it sweetness?



SCION CUTTING

During the winter dormancy we can take scion material for grafting new trees. Select strongly growing material from last year's growth, label it and store sealed in plastic bags in the fridge. Alternatively, you can sink them around two thirds deep in moist sand in permanent shade. Cut them long so there's plenty to bury. The closer to grafting time you take scions the better, but it's convenient to harvest scion material as you winter prune, and they do store very well. See our video and more detailed instructions at ptes.org/scion. ●

TREE GRANTS AVAILABLE

We know that habitat continuity creates the best opportunities for biodiversity to burgeon. However, our research shows that many old orchards will soon be lost as there hasn't been any replanting for many decades. So this year we are again offering a chance for free new trees to be planted in old orchards. Find out if this is for you at www.ptes.org/orchard-grants, or call Steve on 020 7062 8618. ●

Chill hours

Part of the yearly cycle of plants is low autumn temperatures stimulating leaf-drop and dormancy, and conversely the spring thaw stimulating bud burst. In between these two events is when plants receive 'chill hours'. Because of our temperate UK climate, we don't overly concern ourselves with these, but it's interesting to know why they're important, particularly since they don't make winters like they used to. Most fruit trees grown in the UK like around 800-1000+ hours of chilling but vary between species and variety. So what exactly is a chill hour? It's when the temperature is 1-10° C (or 34-50° F), give or take. For some reason, sub-zero temperatures don't provide chill hours. We've no idea why and we're not sure

anyone has! Any hours that are above 12° C (55° F) have to be taken away from the total. That means we need about 41 days (in total hours) during the winter when the temperature is below 10 degrees. Let's be honest, we probably get that in the summer, but last winter was so mild that we nearly didn't get enough. If temperatures don't fall, some trees fail to go into proper dormancy which means they won't get their chill requirements, causing all sorts of problems with fruit production, pests and diseases. One solution may be to grow varieties needing less chill hours. But without warmer, longer summers, many of these will fail to ripen properly giving poor quality fruit, which is why we don't grow them already. ●

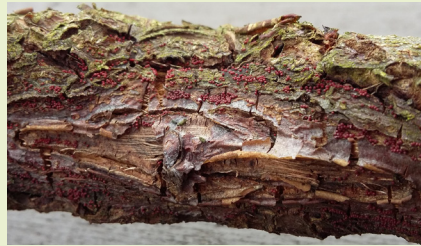




Pests and diseases

SCAB

Scab on apple and pear is caused by fungal organisms. In most cases it's little more than a cosmetic blemish, but severe infections can cause significant leaf damage, reduced cropping, and ruined fruit. An effective preventative measure is simply good orchard hygiene. Spores are released in spring from last year's infected leaves and fruit on the orchard floor, so once all the leaves have dropped, clear them up. If they can be removed from the site or burned, all the better, if not, pile them up on a compost heap and make sure they're covered over. Young growth can also be infected so cut out any branches with lesions. Once the host material has rotted, the fungus will die. Urea can be used to encourage faster decomposition. Crystals can be bought online or use diluted urine. Either way, just water it over the fallen leaves.



so don't leave prunings on the ground: remove, burn or bury in the compost heap. High nitrogen feeds, like manure, will encourage soft sappy growth which is vulnerable to infection. Don't prune in damp weather when the spores are most active, and if canker is thought to be present, wipe your tools with methylated spirits between trees.

CODLING MOTH

This winged fiend is a pest among pests. Distribution across the country seems patchy, with Devon apparently completely free. Could this be a case of herd immunity, as even codling moths know better than to bite into a tannic cider apple. The moth larvae destroy the core of the apple, emitting a sticky brown frass in- and outside of the developing fruit. Infected fruit mature and drop early. Again, good hygiene is useful in prevention and control. The larvae pupate in leaf litter and crevices, so clearing leaf



CANKER

The infection can be seen as dark pitted and flaking lesions on the bark. Small infections can be cut off or sliced out, but serious cankers low down on the trunk will dramatically reduce the life of the tree or kill it. Preventative measures are best taken in the winter. Canker enjoys a still, damp environment, so keep trees well pruned with airy centres. One must, as the saying goes, be able to throw one's hat through the middle of the tree (considered the downfall of the Mexican orchard industry), and maintain a good amount of open space between trees. Inspect the bark after leaf-fall for anything suspicious and prune it out. Canker continues to live on dead wood for up to two years



UK Moths.org.uk

debris will get rid of some, and lightly scarifying the ground will likely expose more for the birds to pick off. You can place corrugated cardboard around the base of affected trees inside which the moth will pupate. Then dispose of it in the autumn, although this will probably take a few beneficials with it, like earwigs. ●

ORCHARD EVENTS

Have you looked at www.ptes.org/orchardnetworkevents to see what orchard events are happening near you? Here are just a couple from next month; there are many, many more online:

Pruning Fruit Trees

February 4th at Queenswood and Bodenham Lake Country Park, Dinmore Hill, Nr. Leominster, Herefordshire.

£60. Booking essential. To book a place on please contact Julia Morton or Laurence Green on 01432 356872.

February 11th at Jesmond Community Orchard, St Andrews Cemetery, Great N Rd, Newcastle upon Tyne.

Led by local members Gil O'Connell, Lynda Fan and Fiona Clarke, you will be introduced to techniques of pruning fruit trees to improve shape and yield. Visit www.jesmondcommunityorchard.kk5.org for more details.

Scion wood exchange

February 5th at Buckingham Garden Centre, Tingewick Rd, Buckingham.

Bring, swap and buy scions for common, uncommon and vanishingly rare fruit tree varieties.

London Amateur Cider Maker Competition

March 8th at Camden Centre, Bidborough Street, London. ●

Contact us

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