



The buzz of Orchard Blossom Day



www.orchardnetwork.org.uk

<https://orchardseverywhere.com/en>

BlossomWatch

OrchardsEverywhere

Orchards across the nation are preparing to open their gates for Orchard Blossom Day. This new annual celebration of fruit trees, flowers and food launches across the UK and Europe on and around the last Friday of April. The Day is celebrating orchards as magical places for the benefit of people and nature, places of a huge but dwindling variety of fruit trees and places in need of conservation across Britain and Europe.



Orchard Blossom Day is now being launched alongside European Orchard Day with support from over 70 supporting organisations, on or around the last day of April - in 2022 it is April 29th. In mid-October this will complement the hugely popular Apple Day events promoted by Common Ground since 1990 to celebrate the apple harvest in all its variety.

This spring the public are encouraged to explore the natural beauty, bounty and biodiversity of our heritage and community orchards. There are now over 1,000 community orchards in Britain, many of them opening their gates to visitors. There is a huge range of orchards where this spectacle can be viewed from urban allotments, fruiting hedgerows, roadside shadow orchards, espaliered orchards of walled gardens, commercial cider, perry, plum and cherry orchards and grazed meadow orchards.

All around the country spectacular orchard displays of massed pastel blooms among bright, emerging leaves mark the glorious bursting forth of spring that can take the breath away. Few British sights are as uplifting or evocative as fruit tree boughs heavy with spring blossom. Starting slowly in late February with sprays of pale blackthorn flowers brightening the winter gloom, the season gathers pace in March with the delicate bridal white of pears, plums and damsons, followed in April and May by the cool pinks of cherry trees, the soft blush of the apple and the pale pink of the quince tree - all providing a gloriously optimistic promise of warmer months to come. The swansong of our blossoming orchards will be the crab apples and quinces, which step in at the last minute for a final gorgeous display.



The focus will be on enabling local people to visit local orchards with activities for nature lovers, gardeners, foodies and families. Open Orchards will enable visitors to feed their senses on the beauty of fruit tree blossom, the buzz of pollinators, the taste of orchard products, and the fresh spring air. Sadly the last two spring times have coincided with pandemic lockdowns but as Covid concerns ease the blossom will start to appear. A rough rule of thumb suggests cherry, damson and plum in March, pear in April followed by apple until May/June.

The promoters

The UK Orchard Network, promoters of Orchard Blossom Day, is supported by the Peoples Trust for Endangered Species. It is now working with over seventy regional and national organisations to promote the value of traditional orchards through a focus on Blossom time, alongside The National Trust's Blossom Watch.

The conservation of traditional orchards

Traditional orchards are found across the UK and the rest of Europe but they are a quintessential component of the historic English landscape. They are also important for the range of species they support. Traditional orchards are based on the land management practices which are rapidly disappearing, but which provide excellent conditions for biodiversity to thrive. They are characterised by tall, widely spaced fruit trees with low inputs and low labour but high biological diversity and landscape value.



When managed traditionally, without modern agrochemicals, the biodiversity of old orchards can be comparable to those of ancient woodland, including a number of nationally rare, scarce, or declining species. This diversity was recognised in 2007 when traditional orchards were given Priority Habitat status under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. The modern equivalent with chemically treated trees growing on restricted, short-lived rootstocks is ecologically much poorer.

The mosaic of habitats in traditional orchards is becoming increasingly rare due to neglect, intensification of agriculture and pressure from land development. Traditional orchards have suffered dramatic national decline in the 20th century - around 90% between 1950 and 2007 - and losses continue. The People's Trust for Endangered Species, supported by Natural England, created and now curate an inventory of traditional orchards in England and Wales.

Blossom time everywhere

Blossom time is a great opportunity to enjoy watching the orchards' pollinating wildlife. In a single orchard there may be thousands of buzzy bumblebees and honey bees, as well as the other pollinators like solitary mining bees, flies, hoverflies, butterflies and beetles, along with birds that are attracted by the insects which are busy collecting as much nectar as they can to feed



their growing young. These flighty insects are the key to the successful cross-pollination of apples, pears, plums and most sweet cherries which is so vital for the forthcoming fruit harvest.

Blossom is part of the May Day tradition of celebrating Spring, fertility and femininity with communities that 'bring in the May' and crown the May Queen. This may also have origins in the Roman festival of flowers. In Japan, cherry tree blossom is traditionally celebrated as 'Hanami', or flower viewing, which is all about enjoying the fleeting beauty of blossom trees as they bloom and then fall as flower rain or 'Han no ame'. It's more than a symbol of spring as it represents renewal and hope. Across Europe fruit tree blossom is variously celebrated, such as the almond blossom festival in Agrigento, Sicily.



Different areas of Britain have their own distinct ways of celebrating orchard blossom displays, whether it's damson orchards in the Lyth Valley in Cumbria, perry pear and cider orchards in the three counties of Herefordshire, Worcestershire and Gloucestershire, plum orchards in the Vale of Evesham or the apple and cherry orchards of Kent. There are now orchard blossom trails for cars and bikes, an Apple Blossom Festival in Armagh, a cherry blossom festival at the Brogdale National Fruit Collection in Kent and a 45 mile plum Blossom Trail around Pershore.

In the nineteenth century the Tamar Valley of Cornwall was famous for its cherry gardens, extraordinary variety of fruit and the remarkable beauty of its spring time blossom. These views are now evocatively captured in archive photographs of the time when paddle steamers brought sightseers from Devonport and Plymouth upstream to enjoy the seasonal displays of apple and cherry blossom on both sides of the tidal river. The National Trust's showpiece orchard at Cotehele, on the banks of the Tamar, continues that floral display. The National Trust, with 200 or so orchards, also hosts fine orchard blossom displays at its other iconic properties like Sissinghurst in Kent and Bateman's in East Sussex. Their Blossom Watch Day on 23rd April 2022 will enable visitors to share their pictures of beautiful blossom on social media.

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The website will have an online map of Open Orchards during this blossom time, a comprehensive guide to orchards, and some guidance for orchard managers on how to make their site or trail interesting and informative. This includes a series of possible activities and weblinks for orchard groups, managers and the general public.



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Register your venue for an Orchard Blossom Day event [here](#)
Find your local Open Orchard [here](#)