



One Planet Matters

Benefits of Community Orchards

Community and connectivity

Orchards have been used by communities for centuries, as spaces where people come together to socialise as well as to **work together with nature and one another** to create abundant harvests that help to sustain the locality. Orchards and their fruits have become **important cultural sites** which link people to place and heritage and have been the **basis of many traditions**.

The rise of commercially-grown apples and the use of freight to transport them globally has meant that over the years, we have lost many of the unique cultivars that we used to enjoy, as well as the local knowledge of how to produce them. The commercial apples we eat now come from only 4 or 5 parent varieties, whereas we used to grow apples from **thousands of different varieties!** Luckily, community orchards are becoming more common again in the UK, with people rediscovering the joy of growing fresh fruit locally and **relearning traditional skills** such as pruning and grafting.

Urban climate change mitigation

Orchards increase tree coverage in cities, and trees hold carbon-capturing and pollution-reducing potential, which are important elements of climate change mitigation, particularly in urban areas where there is a need for more greenspaces. Trees also reduce flood risk in cities, as they absorb some of the excess rainfall, as well as having a cooling effect on cities which are generally slightly warmer than rural areas due to the 'Urban Heat Island effect'.

Supporting biodiversity

According to DEFRA and Natural England, orchards are priority habitats. A key reason why fruit trees are so beneficial for wildlife is because they grow veteran features more quickly than other trees. These features include hollow trunks, rot holes, split bark, sap runs and dead wood - all of which make orchard trees an important place of refuge for an array of wildlife species, including many which are deemed conservation priorities under the national Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP). Some examples of the biodiversity that orchards support include:

- ❖ **Bats** such as Noctule, Pipistrelle and Greater Horseshoe, which nest in rot holes and feed on the insects that orchards provide food and homes for.
- ❖ **Little owls, Treecreepers, Green Woodpeckers and Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers**, which find a home in hollow trunks, while **Mistle Thrushes** and **Chaffinches** make their nests in the branches.
- ❖ Over 400 species of saproxylic invertebrates, such as the Stag Beetle, Violet Oil-Beetle, and the very rare Noble Chafer beetle which live on decaying wood.
- ❖ **Redwings, Fieldfares** and **Foxes** make a feast of fallen fruit in the autumn.
- ❖ **Bracket fungi**, such as Shaggy Polypore and Chicken of the Woods, feed on the decaying wood on orchard trees. The very rare Orchard Toothcrust is another example, which is only found on apple trees.

As well as the important decaying elements of fruit trees, their **blossoms also provide nectar for pollinating insects** like bees, butterflies, moths, and hoverflies. Bees and butterflies also benefit from orchards because their trees are more widely spaced than in denser woodlands, so they let in more sunlight and warmth which is important for many flying insects.

