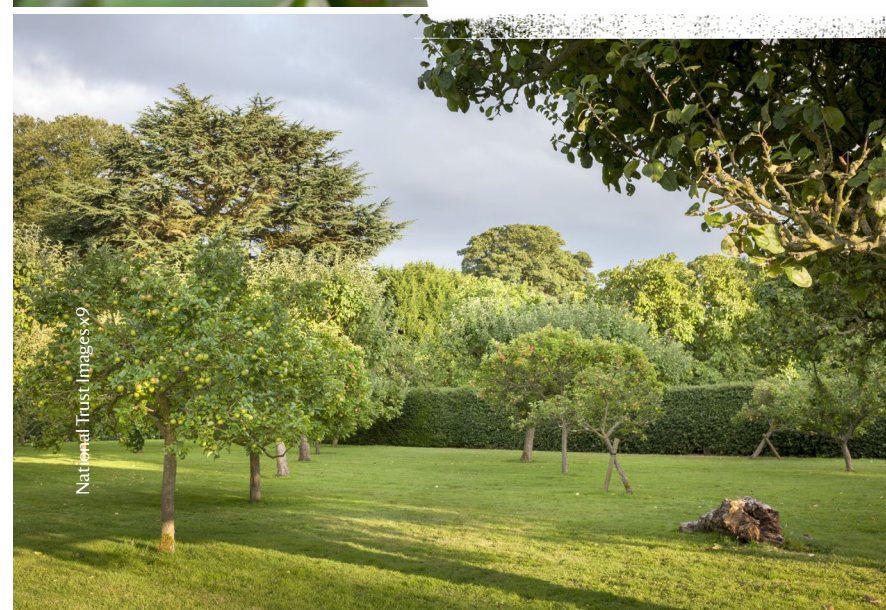


Còre principles

Autumn's the time to enjoy apple days. But, with traditional orchards in decline, **Clare Hargreaves** finds out how the Trust is saving its old fruit trees and planting new ones for future generations



Cornish Gilliflower, Hens' Turds, Foxwhelp, Poorman's Profit, Pig's Snout, Merrylegs, Slack Ma Girdle? These are neither obscure folk bands nor dance steps (nor, in the case of Slack Ma Girdle, some sort of liberating pantyhose) but the deliciously poetic names of just a few of the many apple varieties we've been munching or pressing for millennia.

You could eat a different kind of apple every day for over six years without exhausting Britain's rich apple store. A staggering 2,300 varieties of dessert and cooking apple have been grown in the British Isles since the apple was brought here from Central Asia's Tien Shan Mountains by traders on the Silk Road. Add several hundred cider apple varieties and you have an intoxicating cornucopia of tastes, colours and names.

Drop into your local supermarket, though, and you'll be pushed to find much beyond Gala, Cox and Braeburn. Many of them are imported, even though the apple is one of the foods Britain grows best.

A key reason for the disappearance of other apple varieties is the loss of their habitat – traditional orchards that have lent character to our landscapes over centuries. According to the People's Trust for Endangered Species, which recently undertook an aerial survey of the country's traditional orchards, in 2011 there were 35,378 traditional orchards in England, covering 16,990 hectares (41,984 acres). It might sound a lot, but that's a decline of over two-thirds since 1950, caused by pressure on land for development, intensification of farming and EU policies which incentivised farmers to dig them up.

Traditionally, orchards contained trees that were unsprayed and left to grow to their full height and lifespan, while grazing animals mowed the grass beneath. When the trees perished, the dead wood provided havens for wildlife. Today, to be commercially competitive, fruit growers plant trees in tightly packed rows, often allowing them to grow no taller than bush height to facilitate picking.

'Traditional orchards are one of our most threatened habitats,' says David Bullock, Head of Nature Conservation. 'Their loss is a disaster for biodiversity and wildlife, such as the noble chafer



Trust apples are being used to make juices, chutneys and ciders

beetle, the stock dove and the lesser spotted and green woodpeckers.' The Trust cares for around 120 hectares (297 acres) of traditional orchards in England – plus, notably, the ancient tree at Woolsthorpe Manor, Lincolnshire, whose falling apples are said to have inspired Isaac Newton's thoughts on gravity. 'If we lose our orchards, we're also losing an important part of our cultural and historical heritage,' says David.

The Trust is fighting back, preserving established orchards, planting new ones with heritage varieties, and supporting the creation of community orchards. Their apples are being used in Trust restaurants and to make juices, chutneys and ciders sold in its shops. Apples are also the focus of sociable activities ranging from pruning workshops to apple days and wassails.

Cotehele, Cornwall, has planted a 300-tree Mother Orchard containing 120 apple varieties traditionally grown in the Tamar Valley, and restored a 19th-century cider press which it uses on apple days. Its ancient



Top Lacock Abbey orchard, Wiltshire – one of the many wildlife-rich orchards in Trust care.

Above Apples from the Ardress Estate, County Armagh, that tenant farmer Greg MacNeice has used to produce award-winning ciders.

orchard produces cherries, walnuts, pears and plums, as well as Tamar apples. A similar orchard is being planted at Tyntesfield, Somerset, thanks to a generous donation from local couple Peter and Patricia White. It's aimed partly at preserving a gene pool of Somerset fruit varieties. So far 76 trees, including walnut, pear, quince, medlar and mulberry, have been planted by volunteers. This winter they'll plant plums and cherries, and next winter, Somerset varieties of juicing and cider apples. Many of the apples will come from the National Collection of Cider Apples at Tidnor Wood, near Hereford, which was recently given to the Trust by owner Henry May. Trees from the collection are being planted at Trust places across the South West.

Barrington Court, Somerset, has revived its cider-making tradition and produces over 3,000 litres a year from four hectares (10 acres) of traditional orchards. Its cider and apple juice are sold in its tea-rooms and shop. 'We pump the proceeds straight back into our orchards, which enables us to conserve them and their wildlife, such as the rare mistletoe marble moth,' says Barrington's 'pommelier' Rachel Brewer, who has won a National Trust Fine Farm Produce Award for her produce for six years running. 'Visitors love knowing our cider has zero food miles.'

Also putting ancient apple orchards to productive use is Greg MacNeice, tenant farmer on the Trust's Ardress Estate in County Armagh. Armagh is famous for Bramleys and Greg's family has been growing them since the 1880s. A handful of the original trees on the farm's 40-hectare (100-acre) orchard survive today. Greg is preserving hedgerows for wildlife and building up the population of native bumblebees to help pollination. As well as making craft Mac Ivors cider, the MacNeices have set up a canning factory so their Bramleys can be enjoyed when fresh ones aren't available. Order apple pie at a Trust restaurant in January, and the filling is likely to come from the MacNeices' orchards.

The best thing about the Trust's orchards is the myriad of ways to enjoy them. In winter there's pruning and grafting to learn; in spring, heavenly blossom to admire; and at this time of year, colourful fruit to guess the names of and at some places to buy. We can all help nurture these orchards for future generations, whether by planting trees, joining in apple days – or simply eating apple pie washed down with a glass of cider at your local Trust place. ➡



Clare Hargreaves writes regularly for *BBC Good Food* and *The Independent*. She also runs village hall 'feasts', cooked by top chefs.

i The Trust celebrates ten years of our Fine Farm Produce Awards in 2015. Go to nationaltrust.org.uk/mag/FFPA for the full list of 2015 winners. To find out more about traditional orchards and conservation, visit orchardnetwork.org.uk



Top apple days this autumn

1 Parke, Devon 3 October

Ponies from the Dartmoor Pony Heritage Trust take the apples you've picked from the orchard down to the courtyard to be pressed. The press has been restored by a Parke volunteer using the estate's milled timber.

2 Erddig, Wrexham 3-4 October

Erddig's apple festival is marking its silver anniversary this autumn. Join in the celebrations with cooking demonstrations, cider-making, live music and storytelling.

3 Tatton Park, Cheshire 4 October

Keen gardeners can learn how to prune, train and care for apple trees at a free one-hour talk, and taste and buy heritage apple varieties from Tatton's historic orchards.

4 Hughenden, Buckinghamshire 17-18 October

Hughenden grows 57 varieties of old English cooking and eating apples in its orchard and walled garden. Crush and press your own, try homemade mulled cider and take part in orchard games.

5 The Workhouse, Nottinghamshire 24 October

Try your hand at creating the longest apple peel. The Workhouse is taking part in Southwell's Bramley Apple Festival – held at the place where the Bramley was first grown over 200 years ago.

i Find an apple day in your area at nationaltrust.org.uk/mag/events

'What's your favourite apple name?'

@girl_gardener
@nationaltrust
Peasgood Nonsuch and **Hornsea Herring** are my two favourite apple variety names

@JeffWitts
@nationaltrust
Pam's Delight, because my grandfather produced it

@blackcoffeegal
@nationaltrust
Laxton's Superb apples, had a tree where I grew up. Sweet apples!

@BrookHen
@nationaltrust
Pitmaston Pineapple

Autumn recipes



Apples work well in savoury dishes, too, but our sweet tooth got the better of us. Development Chef **Clive Goudercourt** shares his top apple desserts

Chocolate Apple Betty

Serves 4, with cream or vanilla ice-cream

Ingredients

1kg/2lb 4oz Bramley apples, peeled and cored
30g/1oz butter

For the crumble layer:

125g/5oz soft white breadcrumbs
100g/4oz light soft brown sugar
100g/4oz dark chocolate, roughly chopped
75g/3oz butter, melted
3 heaped tbsp golden syrup

Method

1. Preheat the oven to 190°C/gas mark 5.
2. Cut the apples into large chunks, put them in a pan and toss with the butter and approximately two tablespoons of water over a moderate heat.
3. When the apples start to soften but are still keeping their shape, tip them into a 1.5-litre baking dish.
4. Mix the breadcrumbs, sugar and chocolate and cover the apples loosely with the mixture.
5. Melt the butter with the golden syrup in a small saucepan and pour it over the crumble mixture, making certain to soak them all.
6. Bake for 35 minutes until the apple is soft and the crumbs are golden and crisp.

Apple Harvest Cake

Serves 12

Ingredients

For the cake:

150g/6oz butter or margarine
150g/6oz caster sugar
200g/8oz self-raising flour
3 medium eggs
A splash of milk, if needed

For the filling:

800g/2lb (approx) apples, peeled, cored and sliced
100ml/4fl oz water
2 tbsp sugar
Cinnamon

Method

1. Preheat the oven to 180°C/gas mark 4.
2. Place the apples and other filling ingredients into a pan and cook very gently, keeping the apple slices whole if possible, for 10–15 minutes until soft.
3. Cream the butter and sugar, and alternately add the eggs and flour to the mix until the mixture is dropping consistency. Add a splash of milk if it is too thick.
4. Grease a 9–10 inch springform tin and spread half of the cake mixture in the base. Cover with apple filling and spread the remaining cake mixture on top.
5. Sprinkle with granulated sugar and bake for 50–55 minutes or until golden brown.
6. Cut in the tin and serve hot or cold.

Apple, Raisin and Cider Tea Bread

Serves 8

Ingredients

225g/9oz self-raising flour
120g/5oz butter
Pinch of salt
1 level tsp mixed spice
90g/4oz soft brown sugar
90g/4oz raisins soaked in 2 tbsp cider
1 medium cooking apple, peeled, cored and finely chopped
2 eggs, beaten

For the glaze:

60g/2oz soft brown sugar
2 tbsp cider

Method

1. Preheat the oven to 180°C/gas mark 4 and butter and line a 900g loaf tin.
2. Rub the butter into the flour and stir in the salt, mixed spice, sugar, apple and the raisin and cider mixture. Then mix in the eggs.
3. Put the mixture into the cake tin and bake for about one hour until golden and cooked through. Turn out onto a wire rack.
4. Boil together the glaze ingredients for 3–4 minutes and brush onto the warm loaf. Serve in slices, either plain or buttered.



Share photos of your baking with us on Instagram [#nationaltrust](#)

