



SUFFOLK TRADITIONAL ORCHARDS GROUP

Newsletter and Workshop Programme Autumn 2013

EVENTS

The following courses are scheduled for New Year 2014. Some dates and venues are defined, other are awaiting confirmation. Please contact Paul Read to book and/or receive further details (see p.17). All STOG courses are free.

Programme of events

Date	Event
Sat 25 Jan	Fruit Tree Pruning Course, Waldringfield. Please contact Mariah Skellorn, tel: 07709485979, email: mariahskellorn@hotmail.com
Tue 28 Jan	STOG AGM Redgrave and Lopham Fen. To be confirmed.
Sat 8 Feb	STOG Grafting Course SWT Redgrave and Lopham Fen. 10am – 3:30pm
TBA	There will be a second grafting course to be arranged in Feb or March based at SWT Redgrave & Lopham Fen
Sat 22 Feb	STOG Orchard Surveying Course SWT Foxburrow Farm 10am – 3:30pm. This one day course is for new (and existing) surveyors who volunteer to survey the orchards in their parish.
TBA	STOG Orchard Surveying Course Bures / Sudbury area 10 am—3.30pm. As above.
TBA	‘Planting a traditional orchard’ Melton or Eye area 10 am—3.30 pm

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Paul hasn't just fallen down (left) - though that does happen - he's preparing to photograph a Broad-leaved Helleborine (right) in Meg's Game's cobnut plat in Kent.



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EARWIGS IN ORCHARDS

In the summer newsletter we said there would be more on earwigs and the research being carried out about them as beneficial insects in orchards. We also said that we would try out an experiment over the summer to see if they really could be used to protect fruit trees.



The original research being done by entomologist Michelle Fountain at East Malling Research in Kent (to be completed 2014) was to evaluate whether earwigs are susceptible to certain pesticides used on commercial tree fruits. However, her research involved observing and recording earwigs on apple trees and that meant finding them and encouraging them to stay on fruit trees, resulting in some interesting techniques.

In the course of her research Michelle has highlighted several very useful facts that we as fruit growers could benefit from:

- ◆ Earwigs eat a wide range of small insects, notably woolly and other aphids, scale insects, mites, small larvae of all sorts, including codlin moth, and, if present in quantity, can equal blue tits and wasps in their effectiveness.
- ◆ Not all of the orchards Michelle surveyed had earwigs present. No reason has been evaluated but a previous or current pesticide regime seems likely to be the reason (and arable sites sown with overwinter crops are poor habitats for earwigs).
- ◆ Earwigs do not fly, or at least our common earwig doesn't, despite having wings, but climb into trees from the ground (although they may glide down after climbing a tree - it is thought!) so recolonizing new sites can be slow.
- ◆ Earwigs can be re-introduced into sites by translocation and this seems a very effective method.

Paul has several orchards, all of which have earwigs, easily seen even high up when picking fruit as they hide (roost?) in clusters of ripening fruit in summer and autumn. Even if they can't be seen, their frass – fine dark brown powder sprinkled on the fruit on which they “roost” during the day – gives them away. They never seem to touch undamaged fruit, and create far fewer problems than equally voracious predators, wasps.



Two Suntan apples, just picked, that have been a day-time roosting site for earwigs. The apples are without any blemish, in part because the earwigs eat any small insect from early in the apples' existence. The frass washes off!



- ♦ Earwigs make nests underground (watched over by the mother, and the attentive parents bring food back for their young!). They forage high into the trees to hunt and to collect vegetable matter such as fungi, almost entirely at night. They roost (if that's the word) in dark crevices and holes in bark during the day and can be encouraged to do this in suitable man-made refuges in trees. Michelle's simple method that doubles as a trap has been tried out by Paul.
- ♦ Gardeners in the past used a straw-filled clay flower pot upended on a bamboo cane to trap earwigs using the pot as a daytime roost, destroying all they found as they were considered a pest (although it was mainly flowers such as dahlias that they ate). Michelle's method is a roll of corrugated cardboard (used for protective packaging) inside a plastic water bottle with the base removed, hung in the tree with wire. She demonstrated how many were in the bottle unrolling it onto the ground; they ran away but after dark would return, climb back and return to the roost, attracted by the smell of other earwigs, and the frass left in the cardboard roll. Corrugated cardboard has been replaced these days by bubble wrap which is not as suitable. Paul used hay and straw in plastic bottles as well, but that does need a black paper lining to darken the interior.
- ♦ Well worth a try, but don't then spray your trees with insecticide! Let them do the work.



A 1L plastic squash bottle with its top on to stop the rain, the bottom cut out, filled with a roll of corrugated cardboard (£5/for 75m roll at Amazon).

Wire pushed through holes in the base of the bottle holds the paper in place.

The bottle is tied (with baler string) to one of Paul's Striped Beefing apple trees (with a nice range of lichens!). The base of the bottle is pulled against the branch or trunk with the string so that earwigs can easily crawl up into the bottle.

It takes a couple of weeks before the number of earwigs builds up: a similar 2L bottle held over 50 common Earwigs in September.



Update on Fruit Leathers

Monica Askay

In the summer newsletter I wrote about some experiments with Fruit Leathers. Since then I have made a couple more. This time I was attempting to make unsweetened versions. Both were plum. The first was predominantly Early Rivers, with the addition of a small number of Opal. This I did not sweeten. It was a little sharp but still very palatable. The other was made with a mixture of Cherry Plums, probably picked a little unripe. I did need to add honey to this one or it would have been unpleasantly sharp (and I like sharp, I eat pieces of Bramley while chopping them!). Although I did add quite a bit of honey, the result was rather sharper than the unsweetened Early Rivers!

In the very near future I shall be making some more. This time I plan to make at least 3 ----- Pear, Quince, and Medlar. I would also like to try using a dehydrator rather than the oven. I shall report the results in due course.

A history of Christmas food

Monica Askay

For some years now I have wanted to go on one of Ivan Day's courses, held at his home in Cumbria. I recently achieved my ambition. It was an amazing experience. The course I chose was entitled "A Taste of Christmas Past" and we had the opportunity to cook, and perhaps more importantly to taste, a range of dishes from the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, as well as learn about their earlier origins.

Ivan Day is a celebrated Food Historian who has a wealth of knowledge about, and experience of, cooking recipes from old cookery books and using authentic cooking methods and equipment. His courses are extremely popular. They cover a range of topics and periods. Ivan shares his knowledge and experience with great enthusiasm.

So what did we cook? We cooked a large range of traditional Christmas dishes including the original English Christmas dish of Plum Pottage. This is a delicious soup of beef or mutton broth and dried fruits with Canary wine and grape verjuice, and perfumed with what we would recognise as Christmas spices. The version we made was from John Nott's *The Cook's and Confectioner's Dictionary* 1723 and was a thin consommé-type soup. Much thicker cereal versions were also made in the past. It used to be thought that these were the forerunners to our Christmas Pudding, a "theory" seriously disputed by Ivan. (A note here on the word "plum": As well as our modern definition of being the fruit of the plum tree, "plum" was also a synonym for "raisin" and is defined as both by Dr Johnson in his Dictionary of 1755.)

We made a Cumberland Christmas Hackin (the true origin of our Christmas Pudding). This was a haggis - a mixture including oats, dried fruits and spices, stuffed into cow's intestine and boiled. (*Note: The original definition of a pudding was a mixture of ingredients, whether savoury or sweet, cooked in a natural casing such as an animal's stomach or intestines. The best known examples to survive are Black Pudding, the sausage, and haggis.*) After boiling, the Hackin was sliced and placed underneath the roasting beef, of which more later! It was served with the beef. We also made Ingoldsby Christmas Pudding (with bone marrow rather than suet, resulting in a very rich pudding with a crumbly texture) and Punch Sauce (delicious!). Both these recipes were from Eliza Acton (as I've mentioned previously, brought up in Ipswich). We learnt of the origins of mincemeat and mince pies. We made Spongata an ornate Italian version, "trendy" here in the Regency period and sold by the confectioner Jarrin.



We learnt how to spit roast in front of a fire - a goose with C18th stuffing, and a rib of beef (beef, not goose or turkey, was the most traditional Christmas meat). Using a traditional oven, we also roasted a turkey which had been stuffed with mango (the influence of the East India Company) which was then used to make a delicious sauce. Unfortunately, we did not cook Goose with Sawse Madame (a quince supply issue!). This is our oldest recipe for roast goose and appears in *The Forme of Cury*, c1390, from the Court of Richard II. The goose is stuffed with quince, pears, grapes and hyssop, which are then used to make a sauce. I have the recipe so will be cooking it in the near future (unfortunately in a conventional oven!). I need to source hyssop, but there is an interesting herb garden in my village.....



Spongata, an Italian version of Mince Pie “trendy” during the Regency period.

Talking of quince..... Ivan’s quince did arrive the morning of the course (I also, thanks to Paul, had some quince in my van and wished I’d contacted Ivan in advance to let him know!) Ivan made a delicious quince pie. The quinces for this were boiled whole and sliced. The trimmings (peel, cores, pips) were then boiled further, the liquid strained and with added sugar turned into a syrup. This syrup was mixed with lemon juice and whipping cream to make a delicious ice cream. We also made an Iced Nesselrode Pudding, in Ivan’s words “a popular 19th century chestnut ice cream flavoured with vanilla, maraschino and preserved fruit, a kind of frozen Christmas Pudding”. This was turned into an ornate mould. Both ice creams were made with old technology - in a sorbetiere immersed in ice and salt and turned with a spaddle.

The above is by no means an exhaustive list! We also made a Yorkshire Christmas Pie - our version contained boned turkey breast, wild duck and partridge, and a forcemeat containing truffles, encased in an egg-yolk enriched and strengthened pastry. We made a C17th Grand Salad (an unlikely sounding combination of fresh salad leaves, dried fruits, nuts, pickled and salted cucumber / olives/ capers, fresh and preserved orange, pomegranate seeds, decorated with a sprig of rosemary dipped in whipped egg white to simulate snow - a delicious combination of sweet, sour, salty with a range of textures), and moulded gingerbread. We also decorated a traditional bright pink Twelfth Cake (the forerunner to our Christmas Cake, originally served on Twelfth Night) with ornate moulded sugar work dating back to the C18th. To welcome us to the Saturday evening Dinner, Ivan had made Punch Royal, a delicious lime punch from 1723, brandy-based and flavoured with twists of orange peel (bitter Seville oranges would have been used).

All the dishes we made and tasted were absolutely delicious and it was fascinating to explore traditional Christmas foods and the myths surrounding them. I learnt an amazing amount and will definitely be cooking the dishes again. The course was a real experience and treat!



Monica Askay is a cook and food historian. She is researching the historical culinary uses of orchard fruits, including traditional methods of preservation. She provides wonderful cookery demonstrations at Apple and Plum days and has started an popular scheme to collect and swap recipes at these events.

Monica Askay's recipe stand at an Apple Day with visitors tasting fruit leathers and cordials.

INTERESTING FRUIT AT PLUM AND APPLE DAYS 2013

In 2013 STOG attended and ran a fruit identification service (Paul and helpers) and cooking demos and recipe swaps (Monica) at Apple day events. These were hosted by Suffolk Wildlife Trust's (SWT) [Foxburrow Farm](#), [SWT Redgrave and Lopham Fen](#), and a plum and cobnut day at [Orchard Barn in Ringshall](#) in mid Suffolk. Paul identified fruit at [Lukeswood, Emswell](#), and [Holywells Park, Ipswich](#), and we attended three other events outside Suffolk.

However, we also encouraged orchard and tree owners to send fruit directly to Paul for identification. This year the number of varieties sent to us was more than that brought in at special events; and because this was possible throughout the summer and autumn, the range of fruit was much greater. Also, because we had more time to spend on each identification, we were successful in a higher proportion than in the flurry of a busy Apple Day. However, Apple, Plum and other fruit days will continue to be very important for us to attend.

Most fruit we were brought or sent were apples, with plums, damsons and gages next in numbers and then pears. However, we were also sent bullace, cherry plums (lots), mirabelles, quince, medlars and a fig (the variety Brunswick). Many of these, and feral apple, records are being gathered up to place with [Suffolk Biological Records Centre](#), based at Ipswich Museum. The total number of samples and varieties hasn't yet been properly sorted out but will be added to our Suffolk fruit records.

A few of the most interesting or completely new finds brought to us or sent to us from Suffolk are as follows:



APPLES

Margil, Dumeller's Seedling, Rattle (yet another this year, see previous Newsletter); **Allen's Everlasting** (an Irish apple!); **Ross Nonpareil** (brought to us once before, yet another Irish apple! There is a tree in SWT Foxburrow at Melton). A very nice dark red **Gravenstein** (a Danish apple quite commonly found in Suffolk - this was a Danish dark form called **Mørkrød**, blood red, which we have also seen before); a variety brought in as **Ridgeways Pippin** which hasn't been recorded as far as we know which we have to investigate; **Ingrid Marie** another Danish apple; **Groningen Kroon**, a Dutch apple common in Holland, apparently from a tree bought from Aldi (German and Dutch apples varieties bought as trees from Aldi have become a regular occurrence in recent years!).

There is always a significant number of fruit samples brought to us that we can't identify, for one reason or another, usually because we don't have full descriptions of varieties. In a few cases this is because the variety hasn't ever been recorded!

The apples illustrated are from a bag of large, uniformly flat apples brought to us that can't be identified! Half of every apple is a smooth green, the other half more or less uniformly russeted! It is still hard and solid on 1st December.



Can anyone identify these apples?

PEARS

Emile D'Heyst, Buerre Bedford, and a considerable number that we have not been able to identify.

PLUMS and others

Belle de Louvain a very large plum still grown in Cambridgeshire, but which we haven't seen in Suffolk before. **Cluster Damson**, a late damson that bears many small fruit in dense clusters (we hope to propagate this – it appears to be quite common just in the villages south and west of Stowmarket).

“WILD PEARS”

This year more than any other before, we were sent or brought many feral, so-called “wild pears, often from large trees in isolated positions. In some cases they could be grown-out pear rootstock suckers, but we think most are seedlings trees from many generations of pear trees originating from discarded pear cores or fruit, the same origin as our many feral apple trees.



LEFT: Fruit from a rootstock sucker from the base of a large pear 100+ years old tree in a Bures orchard.

These small fruits are very juicy but exceptionally bitter due to a high tannin content. The main tree bears conventional large juicy fruit (not yet identified but similar to Beurré Diel) and was grafted onto this rootstock, a seedling so-called “wild Pear” or *Pyrus communis*, grown from seed for this purpose.

Trees sold today by gardens centres are on quince rootstock and are dwarf trees. Only a few specialist nurseries (and STOG’s volunteers!) still graft onto seedling pear to create large traditional pear trees.

RIGHT: Fruit from a tree in an old farmhouse orchard/garden in Brome, near Eye.

This is from a grafted tree (on “wild pear” rootstocks) and, although small, is the intended crop. It is very prolific and very juicy. This apple-like shape is not uncommon and we think this fruit variety is the same as a tree in SWT Foxburrow Farm at Melton and a tree in Nowton Park near Bury St. Edmunds. It has still not been identified for certain; until good descriptions of the 350 or so pears known to have been grown in the UK exist (in progress now) it is unlikely this will be possible.



All the fruit illustrated on p. 9 are from “wild pear” trees, often very isolated, often large and clearly old, and do not appear to have been grafted.

They demonstrate the very considerable variety found from Suffolk’s wild pears *Pyrus communis*. It has been thought that a wild pear called *Pyrus pyrastrer* is a native of the British Isles, but the variation between descriptions of that and wild *Pyrus communis* suggests that the two are probably one and the same. It would probably be better to think of these as “feral pears”, seedlings of historic crop pears escaped from cultivation, sometimes many generations earlier, bird, animal or human sown.



A wide variety of fruit from “wild pear” trees in Suffolk



ORCHARD TOOTH – A RARE APPLE TREE FUNGUS

This autumn a rare fungus was discovered on an apple tree in a garden in Bury St Edmunds. Its botanical name is *Sarcodontia crocea*, commonly called **Orchard Tooth**. The owner of the garden, Rob Parker, is Suffolk's Butterfly Recorder and he found the fungus after removing a bird box.

Rob sent the photograph and some samples to Neil Mahler, Suffolk's Fungus Recorder who identified it. *Sarcodontia crocea* is not just rare, it's extremely rare, found only twice before in Suffolk, most recently in 2011, and is almost always found on apple wood. It is a UK Priority Species and, as such, identified as being one of the most threatened or declining species and requiring conservation action. It is listed in the Suffolk Biodiversity Action Plan.

The implications of this need to be addressed in the coming months. Orchard Tooth affects the heart wood only and, in this respect is not considered to be a killer. However very ancient trees may not be infected with just a single fungus and other fruiting bodies may be present. As it happened, Paul had been trying to identify the very same tree from fruit that Rob had brought in. It fits the old, perhaps ancient, apple variety Margil, of unknown origin and known in England under perhaps 10 or 15 names including **Fail-me-Never**, **Never Fail**, **Muscat** and **Money Musk**, and may be the same as apples called **Sugar**. It is known throughout northern Europe by an even greater multitude of names.



LEFT: Rob Parker in his garden in Bury St Edmunds with apple tree Margil (Oct 2013). The bird box, behind which the Orchard Tooth was hiding, is high up on the branch to the left .

RIGHT: Orchard Tooth fungus on the scar of a previously broken branch, after removing the bird box.

The tree is unbalanced and at risk of falling due to the live branch leaning heavily to the right. We hope careful surgery can deal with this risk, for a while at least.





Originally recorded as **Margil in** about 1750, it is impossible to know how long the apple variety has been grown here. STOG had already noted it for propagation at the next grafting sessions in February. Although Margil is relatively well-known, and occasionally propagated, new versions of these ancient cultivars are always worth propagating onto long-lived large tree rootstocks, and we had already been considering how best to keep the tree alive and productive. The garden in which it grows was once part of an orchard well inside the town of Bury before 1920.

CAN YOU HELP US? THE CHERRY 'POLSTEAD BLACK'

Polstead Black, small, barely 15mm, intensely flavoured.

"A small black skinned sweet cherry local to the village of Polstead near Hadleigh. Recorded as being sold on Sudbury market in the 1940s. Distinctively red fleshed and very juicy."

"They rose high on Sudbury market-hill when I was a boy; dark, dull, delicious".

"Polstead cherries, Polstead cherries, Red as Maria Marten's blood!"

(Remembering her murder in the Red Barn at Polstead in 1878).

This time we would like help on a traditional variety of cherry well known both internationally as well as locally as Polstead Black. It is not a very ancient name, the cherry probably known as a distinct variety only since the mid 20th century, although cherries of other varieties have been grown in and around Polstead and probably for at least as long in other south Suffolk parishes, from Bergolt to Bures and Sudbury. At barely 1.5cm across Polstead Black is very small but not the smallest edible cherry variety; there are smaller in the National Fruit Collection at Brogdale, Kent.



Here you see Polstead Black compared with two cherry varieties once grown commercially in Suffolk: Napoleon, originally called Napoleon Bigarreau, or just Naps to the market stall holders, is a so-called Whiteheart cherry with clear juice, pale flesh and more or less transparent skin. Emperor Francis , once known from Suffolk markets, and other similar black cherries, have very dark red purple flesh and juice, and opaque dark skin. They are much larger than Polstead Black.



The Polstead Black has, in recent years, been lifted from almost total obscurity. It isn't listed in any book on cherries before the internet; the English classic book '*Cherries*' by Norman Grubb (1949) does not mention it, and it was not grown in the National Fruit Collection (NFC) until an ex-Kew retired botanist, Edgar Milne-Redhead, sent some graft wood to the National Collection as late as 1992.

Since then the NFC has distributed graft wood and it is sold now by several nurseries and outlets in Suffolk and elsewhere in England, always on a dwarfing rootstock called Colt. This means that all the new trees generated since that time are the clones of this single tree, although which tree and where it was, or still is, is not known. For the last two years, cherries and plums in the National Fruit Collection have suffered from the infectious stone fruit disease Plum Pox and so no graft wood can be distributed and it is not known when that restriction will be lifted, perhaps not for many years.

In the past, selected cherry varieties were grafted onto wild cherry seedlings, but at least some of the oldest trees we have seen, said to be Polstead Blacks, may not have been grafted and so must be seedlings. We would like to check this. Far from this being a problem it may actually help determine whether Polstead Blacks were once a population of seedling grown trees, and therefore part of a rather different fruit growing tradition (today almost entirely vanished from Europe) where what are sometimes called "landraces" of a fruit were grown from seed together in orchards. It is thought that landrace cherries would have been grown this way, but it is more widely known in England for greengages, damsons and walnuts (and perhaps for certain apples).

An evaluation of the remaining old trees may also help determine the origin of the Polstead Black, and its relationship with the rootstocks used for clonally propagated cherry trees that made up almost all the other cherry trees in Suffolk. A small piece of research carried out in the 1920's suggested that in Devon seedling wild cherry trees used as rootstocks (known in Suffolk as **mazzards**) for cultivated cherry trees had evolved into useful crop varieties. Unfortunately it seems none of those recorded at that time appear to be in cultivation today.

We would like to record the old Polstead Black trees and photograph them and their fruit and, if possible, carry out some DNA analysis on them. For this we need local assistance to locate the trees and for local people to actively take part in this project. A draft summary of what we know about Polstead Blacks, landrace fruit varieties and the history of cherries in Suffolk is being compiled with help from the NFC archives, and this should be ready early in 2014.

Please let us know if you have any knowledge of any Polstead Black trees, their locations, origins and any other information, would like to help with the project, or if you would just like to see what we know so far.



Richard Cowell from the Rowley Wood community group with a magnificent cherry tree, probably well over 100 years old, beside a road in Leavenheath.

The tree is said to be a Polstead Black, and we would like to know if it really is.

Almost all the hundreds of Polstead Black trees in existence today are clonal versions of the tree in the National Fruit Collection and have been grafted onto the dwarfing Colt rootstock by nurserymen for sale.

This tree has no obvious signs of being grafted and is maybe growing on its own roots – if so, it's very likely to be a seedling.

Recently STOG has grafted wood from the NFC's tree onto wild cherry seedlings that could ultimately make trees like this.



In August 2013 a group of STOG cobnut enthusiasts spent a day with Meg Game, ecologist and Secretary of the Kentish Cobnut Association (left), in her cobnut plat in Kent and at John Canon's collection of nearly 50 cobnut varieties on his nut plat nearby.



SUFFOLK ORCHARD SURVEY

Most of our volunteer orchard surveyors really enjoy the experience of walking their parishes, meeting people and contributing to a county-wide project. One of our surveyors, Susan Mobbs, has generously agreed to share her experiences from North Suffolk:

"Surveying the Orchards in my own parish and the neighbouring ones has been so interesting and also fun. After all we have had a wonderful summer and a long mild autumn, so what could be better than searching for hidden treasure in the Suffolk countryside?"

A treasure is "something valuable" or "precious objects" says the dictionary, and it describes perfectly how I feel about finding an old orchard with its twisty apple trunks, majestic pear trees and huge stands of cobnuts.

You never know what to expect. I have had to recall childhood skills like crawling under branches and brambles as some orchard sites have been so overgrown. Some have gone completely, others are now part of well-manicured gardens with maybe one or two old timer trees left for their beauty. A special few are lovingly tended and new trees are growing among the old.

Owners are as varied, some interested in the project and happy to talk for ages, others just wanting to leave you to it. I am looking forward to the next stage of the project to see what hidden gems of old varieties may be out there in the old orchards I have recorded. "

Susan Mobbs November 2013

We're always looking out for new volunteers to join our survey work to uncover the nature and extent of Suffolk's orchards. We provide a survey pack with full instructions and maps showing a) the orchards recorded from the early 1900s, b) the orchards marked on the current OS map and c) the PTES potential orchards. We ask volunteers to 'ground-truth' these orchards in their own patch through local knowledge and walking the area. The end results will be mapped and described in a detailed report, benefitting communities and the county. We also run free courses on the background to the survey and how to go about the survey in practical terms. The next course will be on Saturday 22nd February at SWT's Foxburrow Farm and there will be another one in the Bures / Sudbury area shortly after that.

From the survey results we have to date, it seems as though about one sixth of the early 1900s sites have retained recognisable orchard trees; the rest now form part of gardens, have been built over or are more or less abandoned. However, we have also assisted some owners of old, grown-over orchards to sensitively restore them and to help several communities, individuals and schools to plant new orchards with traditional varieties and manage them in a traditional and sustainable manner.

We have nearly 150 surveyors who are currently covering about 200 parishes. We have completed surveys in 38 parishes to date. Since Suffolk has over 420 parishes in total, we have some way to go!

We would also like to make contact with anyone interested in looking at specific orchards in order to complete one element of the project - checking the sites identified by the People's Trust for Endangered Species as orchards. If you'd like to volunteer to look at specific sites, do please get in touch with either Gen or Paul!



Cobnuts

Monica Askay

On Saturday August 31st, Paul and I attended an Autumn Plum, Cobnut and Harvest Festival at Wandlebury Country Park near Cambridge. There we found green cobnuts for sale and bought 3 kilos. Some of these Paul offered to visitors for tasting. The remainder (possibly 2½ kilos) I took home to experiment with. I was disappointed to find a fairly high proportion were either not yet ready, or were bad.

Green cobnuts do not keep very long. As an experiment I shelled most of them and froze them in a lidded container. The rest I stored in the fridge for a week or so and used them in a variety of ways. After my experiments to date and discussion with Meg Game (thanks Meg) I came to the conclusion that green cobnuts are best eaten either on their own as a “nibble”, or perhaps with medjool dates and cheese, at the end of a meal. For culinary purposes it is probably best to wait until brown, or dried when they have a firmer texture and deeper flavour.

I toasted the cobnuts to add to various dishes. To toast the nuts I essentially dry-fried them in a hot frying pan, ensuring that I kept them on the move to stop them burning. I then tipped them onto a plate to cool. Toasted green cobnuts taste amazingly like sweetcorn! They are also still very moist.

I added some of the toasted cobnuts to a green salad, dressed with hazelnut oil and Apple Balsamic Vinegar (Aspall's). I also made a squash, sage and cobnut risotto.

Freezing the cobnuts was unfortunately not a great success. Freezing and defrosting them makes them much wetter. They are not as good for eating fresh after freezing. It is also not so successful attempting to toast them after freezing. I did toast some and scattered them over a salad dressed with a hazelnut oil and apple balsamic dressing. I toasted some more and then made a Cobnut and Sage Pesto, with hazelnut oil (Hazel and Sage Pesto goes well with whole-wheat spaghetti). I also fried some in oil, drained them and sprinkled them with salt and cumin, to serve with drinks. On reflection, it would be better to buy smaller quantities, store them in the fridge and use them in 2 or 3 days. Waitrose sell them in season.

I would like to experiment with brown / dried cobnuts.



Monica concentrating on spiced plums and spicy roasted cobnuts at Orchard Barn, Ringshall.



Of recipe swaps.....

Monica Askay

As you will be aware this year we decided to include recipe swaps at assorted fruit and nut days and on-line. I would like to thank the volunteers who helped make this possible. Their help was much appreciated. I should also like to thank all those who made dishes and brought recipes to share.

For the next newsletter I shall be writing a fuller report of the recipe swaps, including some of the recipes. **In the meantime if you have any fruit or nut recipes you would like to share please send them in!**



Recipe swaps at SWT Redgrave and Lopham Fen Apple Day. This involves everyone trying every swap!

Experiments with mulberries

Monica Askay

Following Paul's article in the last newsletter, and a mulberry recipe from Kate Grant (thanks Kate), I decided to experiment with mulberries.

I tried both White Mulberries (black!), and Black (dark red!) straight from the tree. I really enjoyed both although I am quite unable to describe the taste! White Mulberries are a bit smaller, rather firmer and less juicy (and, I should imagine have better keeping qualities). To me, Black Mulberries are the superior species for eating, being larger and rather juicier, with a bit more acidity. Picking them is quite an undertaking which can result in clothes and skin stained purple!

I discovered that Kate has a Black Mulberry tree and that she sells the mulberries and a delicious jam made from them at a local WI Country Market. I picked / bought some mulberries and jam from Kate.

What did I do with the mulberries? I included some in a Summer Fruit Salad with cherries, raspberries, and orange zest and juice. Delicious! I modified a Raspberry and Lime Cake by using mulberries with orange. Next year, I plan to try both Mulberry Eton Mess and Mulberry Trifle. I also intend to make Mulberry Gin and Mulberry Syrup (I had bought a bottle some time ago and have been pouring it over good Vanilla Ice Cream). Kate's jam is really good with scones.

Following Paul's comments on the ease with which cuttings root, I have planted 5 such cuttings of Black Mulberry (thanks Paul!). Apparently it will take about 12 years for them to fruit! Watch this space.....



CAN YOU HELP US? FRUIT TREES BY THE SEA

In our “Can you help us?” slot last winter we asked if you knew of any fruit trees growing by the sea, knew of particular apple names or had seen fungi on plum trees. We were delighted to receive several responses which have been of great value.

We’re now beginning to realise that there are more than just a few apples and pears growing by the sea. Over the year we have had reports of many apples and pears and even plums and damsons growing close to the sea. In fact, we have received so many reports that one of our volunteer surveyors, Sarah Day, has started to map them on her regular walk from Dunwich Heath to Minsmere sluice.

So please tell us about any fruit trees that you know of - we would be overjoyed to hear of trees elsewhere! We plan to highlight Sarah’s finds in the next newsletter and will also make the map available online on our website.

Comment

Following the article about the variety Jazz in our summer newsletter, please note Paul’s comment:

“Jazz is a cross between Gala and Braeburn (and if anything harder than both); it was bred in New Zealand and every tree purchaser pays a royalty to the breeder! Perhaps the Mail online had received a press release from New Zealand! Sadly, the article doesn’t say that it’s already widely grown in England.... particularly in, er, Suffolk.”

Correction

Please note that the captions for the mulberries in the summer newsletter (page 7) should have read:

Top left White mulberry *Morus alba*, **Top right** Ripe fruit, partially ripe and completely unripe fruit present together, **Bottom left** Black fruit of the white mulberry

Next newsletter due : spring 2014

Contact us

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