



Colwall Orchard Group

Restoring, promoting and celebrating traditional orchards

Newsletter – Autumn 2020



Dear COG Member

Well the year has certainly not gone to plan! But despite everything we have kept busy managing and improving our orchards at Colwall Village Garden and Lugg's Mill, as well as helping others to prune and maintain their orchards in Colwall. To be honest our two community orchards along with the allotments we rent to tenants at Colwall Village Garden have provided a wonderful focus for social interaction as well as physical activity, a connection with nature and a feeling of achievement through cultivation, that many of us craved during lock down. Great for our health and well-being as we have always known!

This Newsletter takes a little look back but is mainly about our plans for the autumn and winter ahead with information about harvesting orchard fruit and tips on when, what and how to make the most of your fruit. We also have news of our new funding scheme to support orchard owners to plant more fruit trees in Colwall over the winter.

We have updates on our footpath and bridge and our meadow project. And despite not being able to hold events we have news of how we will celebrate Apple Day.

So read on for more information about all of this.

Best wishes and good health to you

From the COG Board of Directors and Trustees

Apple Day celebrations

National Apple Day is on 21st October. Launched in 1990 by Common Ground, the aspiration was to “create a calendar custom and an autumn holiday. From the start, Apple Day was intended to be both a celebration and a demonstration of the variety we are in danger of losing, not simply in apples, but in the richness and diversity of landscape, ecology and culture too.” (Ref Common Ground)

Usually by now we are well into planning our annual Apple Day celebration. However, with Covid-19 restrictions, sadly this year we have decided that our regular and extremely popular event will not be possible. We will miss the communal apple juicing, display of local varieties of fruit, the apple games, music and refreshments. But Apple Day will not be forgotten, and we will celebrate with a week of online apple-themed advice and activities. We will also be offering help to members by booking in a small number of sessions to help you to juice your fruit. More details follow below.

OCTOBER 21st
APPLE DAY

When are my apples ready to harvest?

Working out when apples are ready for picking is a tricky decision for most of us. Commercial growers will use a variety of visual and physical indicators, their experience, and possibly even the use of science in the form of a Starch Iodine test to determine the state of maturity of their fruit and when to harvest it.



For those of us growing fruit on a less intensive scale there are a few rules and indicators that can give us a good idea when to pick fruit. A distinction also needs to be made between the right time to harvest fruit and the time to eat it - which can be quite different.

On the COG website you'll find helpful tips and rules that may assist you with decision making before you start to take precious fruit from your favourite apple tree. Follow the link to [Resources](#) and scroll down to the bottom of the page where you will find a document to download.

What to do with my fruit?

There are plenty of ways to use the fruit from your orchard or garden trees and to a large extent the choice you make depends on the quantity you have and the variety of fruit. Eating it fresh from the tree is obviously a good choice but there is only so much we can manage to eat in puddings and other favourite recipes. Freezing is another good option but, if like me, your freezer fills up quickly and you are looking for other ways to preserve your fruit here is a summary of some of the main options:

Jam, Jelly and Chutney

Plums, Damsons, Mirabelles and Greengages mostly ripen and are ready to pick during August and make great jam, jelly and chutney. Apples are an important ingredient of many chutneys too and can also be made into jam and jelly.

We have been busy turning our Colwall orchard and allotment harvest into a wonderful selection of jams, jellies and chutneys. A new one for this year is Crab Apple and Blackberry Jelly which has a great colour and delicious taste. To purchase produce from COG see below.

Juice

Particularly good for apples and pears! As well as drinking it fresh, within a few days of juicing, and of course sharing this with family and friends, you can keep some for use later in the year by freezing it in plastic bottles. Another great way to store your juice for a year or longer is pasteurisation. This does require specialised equipment which we have been purchasing and is a service we offered for the first-time last Apple Day.

The actual juicing is not that difficult and with some simple equipment you can process a good quantity of fruit for later use. More information will be provided on our website soon, and if you would like help with juicing, see below.

Alcohol

The other traditional way to preserve your fruit in liquid form is to turn it into alcohol! Damsons and Sloes are great for adding to gin and vodka and there are many liqueur-type drinks to distil. For our apple and pears, the long tradition is to make cider and perry. Some of our members are experimenting with this and we hope we will be able to share more tips as well as a glass of tippie in the future. In the meantime, we have produced some excellent cider vinegar with many beauty, household and cooking uses!

COG Juicing Service

If you would like COG to juice your fruit please contact secretary@colwallorchardgroup.org for more information. We are offering this service to COG members only, with strict adherence to COVID-19 guidance, during October. This means that you drop off your fruit at the Apple Packing Shed, Colwall Village Garden and collect the juice at an agreed time.

We charge £1 per litre juiced and as a steer a large trug of apples should produce roughly 9 litres of juice. If you want to purchase 75cl bottles from us they will cost £1 each. Alternatively, we can take your apples then juice, bottle and pasteurise them for you for £2.50 per 75cl bottle. This juice can then be stored without refrigeration for a year.



If you return empty COG apple juice bottles (the ones with a label as pictured), we will refund 40p for each 75cl apple juice bottle we can reuse when bottling the juice we prepare for you.

COG Shop

If you'd like to buy any of our preserves, honey, apple juice or other products you can do so by emailing secretary@colwallorchardgroup.org. You will be able to pay by bank transfer and we will either deliver (Colwall parish only), or you can collect. It all helps to raise funds to support our work of restoring and creating traditional orchards. More detail including price lists and varieties can be found by following this link to [Shop](#).



Orchard library

Following a lead taken from the Marcher Apple Network we have created a small library of orchard-related books for COG members to borrow. These are stored in the Orchard Room at the Apple Packing Shed, Colwall Village Garden and they are available for you to take out on short-term loan by prior arrangement.

The initial contents of the library are those books already held by COG together with the donation of a collection of other horticultural books by Andy. We have also just acquired a set of the Marcher Apple Network 'Apples and Pears' Newsletters which are a fascinating and highly informative read.

We would welcome financial donations for the loan of books, or indeed donations of other books that you think may be a good addition to the library.

A list of the books that are available to borrow on the COG website at [Library](#) and you can request the loan of individual books by emailing us at secretary@colwallorchardgroup.org.

Footpaths and the bridge

You might be wondering what this has to do with an orchard group? But one of our aims is to improve access and the enjoyment of our sites by everyone - our members, the local community, and visitors to the area. We are keen for people to experience the orchards we are creating for the nature they provide, the aesthetic beauty of the locations, and for their personal health and well-being.



So, this year we have been focusing on Lugg's Mill orchard where we have helped to create a link from the Colwall footpath network across privately owned land and into the newly planted orchard. Our thanks go to Jane and Lindsay Williams for creating this path on their land with a financial contribution from Colwall Parish Council, the Malvern Hills AONB as well as from COG. We are hoping that this path, along with a new connecting footpath along the stream at Lugg's Mill, will be adopted to be a Public Right of Way and then start to appear on OS and other maps as they are updated and prepared. But in the meantime, you are very welcome to use them!

Within Lugg's Mill orchard we are creating a circular route around the site which includes the crossing of the stream with a new bridge. We have also started to add more to welcome people to the site including a bench (picture of Bob and Mhari above enjoying a summer picnic) and an interpretation panel with information about the site will be coming soon.

The bridge will create a link between two footpaths. Work is progressing well, and we have used crowdfunding to raise enough money to make a good start. All being well the footbridge will be ready to use by October this year. The digger, with Deb at the controls, has been essential to move earth to make the access to the bridge at a low gradient. Over time we plan to do more work to make it easier for everyone to explore the site. Huge thanks to all the volunteers who have helped but special thanks to Deb for her design (with a structural engineering background), her determination and hard graft to get this done.



Volunteer activities

We have been managing to run our weekly Friday morning practical volunteering sessions since June, with well organised activities for groups of up to a maximum of 6 people. Having missed several months of these regular work parties there has been a lot of interest in returning to work alongside fellow volunteers. Despite us not being able to provide any refreshments (we thought that was why people turned up!) we are now regularly finding tasks to occupy 3 groups of 6 people every

week on locations at Lugg's Mill, Colwall Village Garden and at other orchards in Colwall. In fact we are likely to increase this to 4 groups soon so please do get in touch if you want to be involved. We can't promise that there will be a place for everyone every week but we are happy to rotate and juggle things so that everyone gets a chance to be involved. And with all of the harvesting and orchard planting we have lined up we do need all the help we can get!

Events

All planning for our events is on hold with decisions about whether they can take place made with reference to Government guidelines. We are not holding an Apple Day event in October, but we will be reviewing whether we can hold our annual Mistletoe Fair in December. Keep a look out for details of where and when if it is possible for us to run this outdoor Christmas sale. We will circulate details nearer to the time.

Sadly, unless the guidance on gatherings changes very significantly, our wonderful Wassail in January is unlikely to happen. We will keep you posted of course. New ways to celebrate our orchard heritage, in a COVID-19 safe way are always welcome.

A rare treat at Lugg's Mill

We are delighted to report the sighting of a Kingfisher at our Lugg's Mill Orchard. On a bright, sunny day at the end of August a jewel-like flash of blue was spotted flying low above the stream in a South-North direction. The Kingfisher then perched on a fence to watch the water just near the site entrance onto Old Church Road before it continued flying over the road. A rare treat indeed!



We have always thought that this quiet orchard site, with a deeply incised stream with good tree cover of alder, ash and field maple, is ideal Kingfisher territory so this is a welcome and exciting occasion.

If you have also spotted a kingfisher at Lugg's Mill Orchard, we would love to hear from you.

Meadow update

Many of you will be aware that we have completed year one of a ten-year project to create two one-acre orchard wildflower meadows at our sites at Colwall Village Garden and Lugg's Mill. We are delighted to be able to say that we have had some fantastic results.

At the start of the process we undertook wildflower and bumblebee surveys to establish baseline data on quantities and types of species present. Now, a year later, we have just repeated the process and are able to report on the progress so far.

At Colwall Village Garden we started with very few different plant species in our one-acre pilot plot. The baseline survey indicated a grass dominated sward with almost no wildflowers. However, this Spring we were delighted to see a variety of wildflowers including yellow rattle, meadow buttercup, ox-eye daisy, common mouse ear, ribwort plantain and red clover. All told the presence of desirable species has risen dramatically from an average of 0.3 desirable species / m² in 2019 to 3.6 species / m² in 2020.

The story at the other pilot plot at Lugg's Mill was similar with large number of yellow rattle plants appearing together with common sorrel and ribwort plantain. The desirable plant species have risen from an average of 1.0 / m² in 2019 to 4.2 / m² in 2020.

The bumblebee surveys were less impressive, but from casual observation earlier in the year they were present, just not later in the season when the official survey took place.

All in all, these are very credible results and we are enthused and greatly encouraged. This has been a positive start to what is a long-term piece of work. We are now keen to do more, so we are introducing plug plants of a few additional species.



Pictured are volunteers Ron and Bella busy at work getting some Ragged Robin plug plants in the ground at Colwall Village Garden. These plants, along with cowslips, were propagated and lovingly tended by Carol over the previous few months. We are in the process of sowing seed of other choice meadow plants with a view to planting them out in the orchard next Spring.

Traditional Orchards for the Future Initiative

Working alongside our partners, the Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, we are delighted to be able to report the launch of the Traditional Orchards for the Future Initiative (TOFI). We have written to orchard owners in Colwall inviting them to apply for new trees to extend or to gap up their orchards in order that they continue to exist and thrive.

Traditional orchards are defined as 'groups of at least five fruit and nut trees planted on vigorous rootstocks at low densities in permanent grassland and managed in a low intensity way'. The initiative provides the opportunity for landowners to acquire new trees and tree protection, obtain free advice and free help to plant trees. In return landowners will be responsible for providing a suitable planting location, selecting the fruit trees, and taking care of them after planting.



Pictured here are David Armitage from Malvern Hills AONB and Wendy Thompson, COG Trustee and our Secretary, at the scheme launch at the beginning of July.

The deadline for applications has now passed and the offers of support will be sent to successful applicants within the next couple of weeks. It will then be time to select and purchase appropriate trees before helping to plant them over the winter months.

Tree Order

And talking about planting trees...

As many of you know COG provides a service to members and friends by collating together orders for fruit trees, ornamental and native trees and hedge plants, as well as soft fruit bushes (raspberries, blackcurrants etc). We get trade discount which we share with you and add a bit to our funds.

We order mostly through [Frank Matthews - Trees for Life](#) or [Walcot Organic Nursery](#) so have a look at their websites to get an idea of what is on offer but bear in mind that there is a wider choice available for trade accounts so if you have something in mind let us know. We are also happy to have a chat with you if you would like some advice about what to plant. Or, if you are looking for inspiration, have a look around the community orchard at Colwall Village Garden. Many of the trees are labelled with the variety here, although this is work in progress. You can send your requests now and through to the end of October by email to secretary@colwallorchardgroup.org. We will do our best to get the trees delivered for you to collect from Colwall Village Garden in December.



AGM

Having had to postpone our Annual General Meeting in March 2020, due to the COVID-19 restrictions, we decided to hold the AGM digitally in June. This involved sending the meeting agenda and motions to all members by email on 17th June, and with a deadline to respond by 9pm on 24th June. The motions included the adoption of minutes of the 2019 AGM, the election of new Board members, a resolution on the charity objects and the adoption of the annual accounts. We also circulated the annual report for information. We were pleased to receive votes from 46 members (37%) and that all of the motions were passed.

New Board members

COG is both a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee. This means that we are steered by a Board of Directors who are also Trustees of the charity. As COG is run totally by volunteers the Directors tend to lead on workstreams, as well as advising on policy and direction. You can see a list of the full Board on the website here <https://colwallorchardgroup.org/governance>.

We are delighted to be joined this year by Peter Key, Chris Blake and Jilly Rosser who were all elected at the recent AGM. Following the AGM we were also pleased to co-opt Lisanne Llewellyn as our shadow Treasurer preparing to take on this important role from next March, and also Lindsay Williams returning after a spell of ill health.

All bring a range of skills and experience along with plenty of enthusiasm to the Board.

Raise funds as you shop

A reminder that we have accounts with both Easyfundraising and Amazon Smile.

Easyfundraising collects donations from over 4,000 shops who donate free every time you shop with them. Visit: <https://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/colwallorchard/payments/61/>

Shop on **AmazonSmile** at <https://smile.amazon.co.uk/ch/1142573-0>, and Amazon donates to Colwall Orchard Trust, at no cost to you.

COG News Blog

Some of the items in this newsletter have been lifted from the news page on our website which is updated regularly with the latest stories on what we've been up to. Check this out to keep in touch <https://colwallorchardgroup.org/news-1>. Between newsletters we will send notifications to you about content on the news page from time to time.

As ever a BIG thank you for your continued support to restore, promote and celebrate traditional orchards in Colwall. If you would like more information about getting involved, or have any suggestions or comments, we are always pleased to hear from you.

From the [COG Board](#)

Contact information:

Email: secretary@colwallorchardgroup.org or members@colwallorchardgroup.org

Web: www.colwallorchardgroup.org

Social media: [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#)