

Apples, pears and solitary bees!

What is a solitary bee? In the UK we have about 250 species of solitary bee compared to 25 species of bumblebee and only one species of honeybee! Solitary bees come in all shapes and sizes, colours and lifestyles. Unlike bumblebees and honeybees, solitary bees do not live in a colony. Females work alone to build their nests, provision them with pollen and nectar and lay their eggs. Many species nest in the ground whilst some are aerial nesters in plant stems or dead wood.

(above right) The Red mason bee – a super duper pollinator of orchard fruits.

(right) Pear blossom.



Photo credit: Clare Flynn



Photo credit: Clare Flynn

Orchards – some things to consider

Beautiful orchards were once an integral part of our countryside but after the second world war, changes in agriculture meant that many orchards were lost – a tragedy for us and also for the wildlife that can thrive in a flower rich orchard habitat.

Solitary bees, such as the **Red mason bee** are particularly attracted to fruit blossom and are fantastic fruit tree pollinators! Even in a small garden a single tree can quite easily be planted but planning an orchard takes considerable thought.

Drainage – fruit trees do not like wet soil!

Aspect – the more sun the better.

Exposure – a sheltered site is best.

Varieties – cookers, eaters, cider apples, pears or plums? Traditional or modern? Early or late croppers? Final size of tree and rootstock?

Planting and aftercare – plant in winter when trees are dormant. Aftercare and pruning is necessary to maintain healthy trees and maximise fruit production.



Did you know?

All female bees in the UK have a sting but those of solitary bees are weaker and rarely used on humans.

With their pollinating skills and fascinating behaviour, solitary bees are great to have around!



Photo credit: Clare Flynn



For essential advice, please visit:

<https://ptes.org/campaigns/traditional-orchard-project>



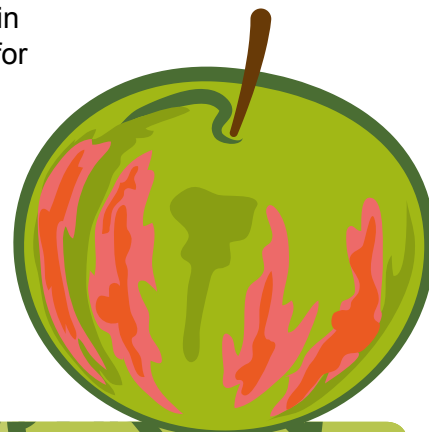
Practical ideas for home-grown fruit

Harvesting and storing apples and pears

- Pick when fruit falls with a gentle pull and twist.
- Store in a cool, dark, well ventilated place, free from mice.
- Use crates with good airflow and ensure fruits are well spaced and checked regularly.
- Apples can also be stored in ventilated bags in a fridge for a few weeks.
- Leave some windfalls for wildlife!



Caution: Be aware of insects which could bite or sting who like to feast on ripe fruit at the end of the summer.



An orchard for wildlife

Try creating...

- A wildflower meadow on the ground beneath your trees.
- Bug hotels suitable for aerial nesting solitary bees.
- A soft fruit garden (e.g. raspberries) under the taller trees.
- Habitat piles and unmown strips to encourage insects and mammals.
- Areas of close mown grass and bare soil for ground nesting solitary bees.



For more information visit: bumblebeeconservation.org and search for 'orchards'.



Brewing Perry and Cider

Cider has a rich rural heritage in Britain but the loss of orchards and many varieties of fruit also saw the sad decline of local cider and perry production.

There is now growing enthusiasm to rejuvenate the brewing of local beverages from traditional varieties of fruit such as Afal Pig Aderyn (apple) and Gwehelog

Red (pear)! The Welsh Perry and Cider Society are providing education and inspiration to support people in creating orchards and discover the world of craft Ciders and Perries.



If you would like to find out more please, contact them at www.welshcider.co.uk



Photo credit: Jayne Hunt



All activities should be carried out with standard **Health and Safety and Risk Assessment** procedures. Children should not carry out any of these activities without responsible adult supervision and some activities using tools may be unsuitable for younger children.

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