

Village initiative to bear fruit

Orchards are part and parcel of South Cambridgeshire's landscapes and heritage. They give us beautiful spring blossom, distinctive varieties of fruit, and a home for wildlife.

The Cottenham Seedling and Cambridge Gage are just two of the district's fruit varieties, and the Chivers jam factory at Impington was one of the works that relied on local orchards.

Many of our traditional orchards have been lost or are overgrown and some excellent community orchards such as Harston and Orwell are vulnerable. Restoring existing orchards and planting new ones has tremendous benefits, ranging from creating attractive places dappled with sun and shade, to teaching children about healthy eating. Community orchards also make great local projects. Everyone can contribute something and villagers can see an orchard grow and mature over time.

We have made the creation and revival of community orchards a priority this year with an ambitious target to support 6 new or restored orchards, and to carry on the initiative in the future. The orchards have to consist of at least 5 trees and be accessible to the public. We will flag up sources of guidance and funding where necessary such as our existing wildlife



grants. It is, however, the community that takes the lead, setting up a local group and organising the planting and maintenance. And it is the village that will benefit, whether from events such as apple

days, enjoying the fruits of their labours or cultivating a new community pastime.

To find out more visit:
www.scams.gov.uk



Creating Community Orchards

Local fruit farmer and leader of the council Cllr Ray Manning has some words of wisdom for community groups looking to create or revive local orchards.

“The first consideration is always which site to choose. It needs to be well drained with no signs of heavy clay as fruit trees will not tolerate waterlogging during the winter. Another factor to bear in mind is whether the site is low-lying. If this is the case there will be a risk of spring frost damaging the blossom. On the flipside, if it is very exposed to cold winds, pollination will be poor so it is a bit of a balancing act.

“The next decision is what trees to plant, apple, pear or plum. Apple trees require the most maintenance and plums the least. In the north of the district plums were widely grown for processing and market. Pears were also an important crop whilst apples were the least in demand of the three.

“All fruit trees are grafted or budded onto a rootstock which will determine the size. For example, Bramley on a M16 or M25 rootstock may grow to over 30 feet high and equally wide. On a M1X rootstock the same tree will be no more than 10 feet high. It will need a strong stake to hold the tree as its roots are very weak.

“Many of our villagers worked in the orchards and, I'm sure, would be happy to offer advice.”