



## Winter 2005/06 may have been cold – but it's been great for fruit growing

Writing this in June, when I am having to shade my gooseberries from the sun to prevent them from burning, it is hard to think back and remember just what a long cold winter we had.

At the RHS Fruit Group Meeting on 22<sup>nd</sup> March Jim Arbury reported that the long, cold winter was likely to

be extremely beneficial to fruit trees. He explained that it would send the trees into a long period of dormancy, which would give them a chance to rest. The recent spell of milder winters has meant that the trees have not been fully dormant and have tended to try to keep growing, which has wasted energy, which should be stored for fruit production.

In my own garden in Hertfordshire the top fruit - apples, pears and plums – were not in full blossom until the last week in April, probably a month later than usual. I noted that my soft fruit was in flower at the same time. My quince did not flower until the second week in May. The show of blossom in my garden was spectacular, as if it had been waiting for so long it decided to all come out at once. By the time it was fully open the air was filled with pollinating insects that had also delayed emerging until the weather warmed up. The combination of spectacular blossom and lots of pollinators has assured me of an excellent fruit set - but this has its own potential problems. A heavy fruit set means that unless I thin the fruit dramatically I risk putting too much stress on the trees to support the heavy weight of fruit. An extremely heavy crop could also cause some trees to go into a bi-annual cropping pattern, which I would like to avoid. Thinning fruit feels like a bit of a sacrilege at the time, but it will pay dividends. In my experience the total weight of fruit that is produced will be similar, but instead of lots of small fruits, the fruit left after thinning will tend to be larger and better quality.

This late blossoming was not exclusive to Hertfordshire but has been reported all round the country. Those of us who visited Wisley or Brogdale at blossom time were treated to a memorable experience.

What has been your experience this season? We have members all over the country and would like to hear any information you have about the effect the long, cold winter had on flowering, fruit set, pests diseases and the resultant fruit. Please write, let me know and I will compile reports for a future issue.

## **Fruit Group Member's Feedback Survey February 2006**

Many thanks to all of you who filled in and returned the Fruit Group Member's Feedback Survey, which was included with the February 2006 Newsletter mailing. The RHS Fruit Group is only as good as its members and it is a while since we formally asked what you want out of the Fruit Group.

I am pleased to report that the response was very high, much higher than one would expect from this type of research. This shows that you want your opinions heard. I have completed my analysis of the questionnaires and presented the findings to the Committee who have taken it very seriously and fully intend to make changes that address some of the issues raised by members.

Most of your comments about the Fruit Group and the Newsletter were extremely complementary, many thanks for your support. However, it would not do to become too complacent and over the next few meetings you should start to see some changes based on some of the positive suggestions that you have made.

You have given us lots of ideas for talks and visits and the Committee will be investigating what we can do to bring some of these to fruition. The information you provided about the best days of the week for meetings and visits has confirmed our view that although weekdays can be awkward for some members, they are preferred by a majority of 3 to 1. There was some concern expressed about the driving distances involved in some visits. This is a difficult one, which will need a lot of thought, and we will be taking this into consideration when planning future visits. Visits and meetings arranged by the regional branches may prove to be closer, and all members are welcome at all regional branch meetings.

Your lists of the fruit that you are growing were amazing. Across the membership there are at least 50 different fruits being grown, all of the common ones plus some real exotics. For each of the 50 fruits there will be different cultivars, in the case of the most popular fruits – apples, pears, gooseberries, blackcurrants and plums – many dozens of different cultivars. This demonstrates the wide breadth of interest amongst the membership, something we will try to address through meetings, visits and the Newsletter.

It is clear that many members do not know the Committee, who they are and what is their interest in fruit. At the meeting on 22<sup>nd</sup> March, as requested by members, we started to introduce the Committee, with John Poole, Chairman of the West Midlands branch, and Tony Benham, our new Treasurer, spending a few minutes saying who they are and what they grow. We are keen to make sure that Committee members are highly visible and that you can approach us with any ideas, suggestions, queries or problems that you may have about the RHS Fruit Group.

Look out for more changes and (hopefully) improvements in the future, and please let us know what you think.

**Alan Mansfield**

**Fruit shows and competitions can be great fun to visit and to enter. Anyone who enters the Summer Fruit & Vegetable Competition in July will get free entry to the Hampton Court Flower Show. If you grow top fruit then there is the Great Autumn Show in October or the late Apple & Pear Competition in November. Even if you are only visiting the shows you can still take part. The RHS Fruit Group is planning to attend the major RHS fruit events this year, to spread the word, encourage more people to grow fruit and join the Fruit Group. To do this we need a rota of members who can devote an hour or so to the Fruit Group table. You do not need in-depth technical knowledge – the Wisley Fruit Department team will be on hand for that. If you can help please contact: Alan Mansfield (Hampton Court Flower Show), Gerry Edwards (Great Autumn Show), Julia Mitchell (Wisley Apple Festival)**

## Fruit at Chelsea 2006

As usual, not a lot of fruit in evidence at Chelsea Flower Show this year, but what little there was made quite an impact.

Winner of the President's Award for the best exhibit in the Great Pavilion was Bournemouth Borough Council with their Beautiful & Healthy themed display. Designed to reflect the healthy lifestyle enjoyed by residents and visitors to Bournemouth the display was surmounted by five giant pieces of fruit constructed from cut flowers. The idea being to represent the '5-a-day' recommendation to eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables for a healthy diet. Something I am sure most Fruit Group members will probably endorse.



There was some splendid tropical fruit from the Caribbean on show, courtesy of exhibits from the Barbados Horticultural Society, the Jamaica Horticultural Society - Chelsea Group, and the Horticultural Society of Trinidad & Tobago.

Pleased to report that our friends at Ken Muir Ltd were awarded a Silver-Gilt Hogg medal for the splendid show of strawberries. Pride of place on the stand was strawberry *Chelsea Pensioner*. It looks like a very nice fruit for late summer, with a degree of resistance to mildew and other diseases, and is sweet and juicy. Sounds lovely.

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## Oxfam use fruit analogy for promotion

Burkina Faso is a relatively small country of just 274,200 sq. km (105,868 sq. miles) situated in West Africa, 13° north of the equator. It is also reckoned to be one of the world's poorest countries, with a population estimated at 10-13 million people to support. For comparison, the UK has a land area of 241,590 sq. km and a population of around 60 million people. It is interesting to see that the charity Oxfam mentions fruit growing in Burkino Faso (sic) on some of its price tags, noting that a purchase of £6.99 will buy 36 fruit trees for the country. It is thought that 90% of the population of Burkina Faso is involved in subsistence agriculture, so fruit growing is a matter of life and death rather than a hobby.

Thank you  
FOR SHOPPING WITH US

**£6.99**

Approximate size  
for guidance only

CODE ~ 728

Unless otherwise shown this item is made  
up from mixed or miscellaneous fibres

**£6.99 buys 36 fruit trees to plant  
in Burkino Faso** 194174

## **A fruit too far? Adrian Baggaley gives his opinion on apricot growing**

I have to say that Tony Gentil's success with apricots (RHS Fruit Group Newsletter February 2006) makes me rather envious.

My experience with apricots started around 15 years ago in a polytunnel. Being a complete dunce at fruit growing at that time (no comments please) I trained the variety *Moorpark* as an espalier. The result was the usual amount of dieback, but surprise, surprise lots of fruit.

What consigned the tree to the bonfire several years later was not the mode of training but the position in the tunnel. The coldest part of the tunnel is the sides, which means frost damage if the blossom and embryo fruit is not protected. My answer to frost was polystyrene sheets rammed down between tree and tunnel cover, with fleece draped across the front. The tree set regular crops but there the success ended.

Polytunnels, by the nature of their design, have no gutter so rain water runs off, down the cover straight into the ground. This provides a vast quantity of water that is sucked straight up by the tree roots. As the fruit approaches ripening all that rainwater water causes the fruits to crack and then brown rot sets in before final ripening. In the odd year that the crop did ripen it was noticeable that the fruit was of dessert quality at the front (south facing) and cooking quality at the rear. The question was, will planting the tree several feet in from the sides cure the problems of cracking and uneven ripening?

### **Outdoors**

My success outdoors has been definitely zilch. Around ten years ago I planted a variety called *Breda* against a south facing block wall. This tree has produced one under-ripe apricot to date. In recent years the abundance of blossom buds has been devastated by bullfinches as early as December. The tree now has a 25mm chicken wire cage around it. Fleece is at the ready at flowering time to protect against frost.

### **Back to indoors**

Four years ago I planted two *Tomcot*, one *Rouge de Tardive* (Delbard) and a *Moorpark*, in a border four feet in from the side of my polytunnel. In 2004 I had a small crop on the *Tomcots* which were absolutely delicious and ripened evenly, far too good to cook. The *Rouge de Tardive* was not impressive and was cooking quality only, disappointing for a French variety. The *Moorpark* has not cropped. Neither *Moorpark* nor *Rouge de Tardive* liked the nipping and pruning associated with cordon culture. I am now aiming at converting all four to pyramids, but the way forward seems to be *Tomcot*, either as a pyramid or a fan. One disadvantage I have noticed over the years is that apricots are notorious for dropping some of their crop at quite a late stage, regardless of quality of crop. Rather soul destroying.

The advantage of indoor culture is that there are no problems with rain on the fruit (which also causes cracking), wasps or birds and, bizarrely, no problems with dogs taking the ripe fruit. Anyone reading Gilberts White's *Gardening Kalendar* will know that his disappearing apricots were being taken by a dog. Interestingly, a customer of mine has the same problem.

**A fruit too far?** continued....

Gilbert White was the Curate of Selbourne in Hampshire and lived at the 'Wakes'. His garden has been authentically restored, I understand, and his writings are still popular 250 years later.

Reading Howard Stringer's report on the Kent apricot orchards (RHS Fruit Group Newsletter February 2006) where several trees died from what appears to be dieback, if nothing else, reminds me of Justin Brooke's book *Apricots, peaches and other stone fruit*. In it he warns when to look for dieback in spring, and how far to cut back damaged branches so that it does not spread to the whole tree. Justin Brooke grew apricots, peaches, nectarines and figs outdoors in East Anglia in the 1940's. Dieback was then a major problem. Possibly the wheel has turned a full circle.

**Adrian Baggaley** grows fruit in Nottinghamshire. The West Midlands Branch of the Fruit Group has arranged a visit to his fruit garden, on Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> August.  
Contact John Beswick, Secretary WM Branch, 01604 403115 For more information.

## **A. W. Barnes Apple**

On the front cover of the February 2006 Fruit Group Newsletter there was a picture of *A.W.Barnes* apples grown by Adrian Baggaley. This caught my attention because this is one of the cultivars that was raised in Cheshire.

Whilst researching the history of fruit growing in Cheshire I found out that this apple and another, *Millicent Barnes*, were raised by N.F.Barnes. Both were crosses of *Gascoynes Scarlet Seedling* and *Cox's Orange Pippin*, raised in 1902/3. N.F. Barnes was head gardener to the Duke of Westminster at Eaton Hall near Chester.

I wanted to know more about N.F.Barnes and discovered that his full name was Nicholas Friend?? Barnes, born in 1864 at Kingsbridge in South Devon. His father was employed as head gardener at Venn House, Kingsbridge and he started work there at the age of 13. Nicholas was employed at Eaton hall from 1892-1946, retiring at the age of 81.

Arthur William Barnes and Millicent Barnes were two of his children. Arthur his eldest son was later killed on 11<sup>th</sup> April 1918 in the Ypres Salient. Arthur was a Captain I the 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Cheshire Regiment.

There was another famous Barnes<sup>1</sup> who worked at Bicton Gardens in Devon in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He had a legal battle with his employer, Lady Rolle, which he won conclusively. Whether these two Barnes were related I do not know, but it does seem quite likely. I would be very interested if any members of the RHS Fruit Group could shed any light on this matter.

**Tony Gentil**, orchard consultant and RHS Fruit Group member

Editor's note:

1. This was James Barnes (1806-1877), Head Gardener at Bicton, who provided John Lindley with information about the origin of '...a very extraordinary variety of *Colletia spinosa* ' which was a matter of great debate between Charles Darwin, C J F Bunbury and John Lindley in 1856.

# Notes of an under-gardener

RHS Fruit Group member and regular contributor to the Fruit Group Newsletter, the Reverend Canon Donald Johnson, brings the past to life with his article on gardening in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

My nephew-in-law has lent me "A Gardener at Chatsworth", and it contains a first-hand account of the life and work of Robert Aughtie at one of the country's most famous great estates. He was one of Joseph Paxton's under-gardeners during the time of the Sixth Duke of Devonshire, and his diary is described as "of singular interest for the light it sheds on working conditions in the gardens of great houses, his friends and colleagues, his landlady and his lodgings, as well as his impressions on first exploring the Derbyshire countryside."

Robert Aughtie was born in London in 1823, eight years after the battle of Waterloo, and it is thought he began work as an apprentice at Chiswick House gardens. He recorded that he began work on the ivy on December 20<sup>th</sup>, 1847, and finished it on January 1<sup>st</sup> 1848 "much depressed in spirits" - a familiar experience to those who tackle a lot of ivy! Chiswick House had belonged to the Dukes of Devonshire from the eighteenth century until 1929. His quiet routine was shattered when he was "much surprised, on returning home, to hear from Mr Edmunds that I would be going to Chatsworth". There was close collaboration between the two estates, and some staff were exchanged.

Chatsworth had a grandeur that was overwhelming when Robert Aughtie arrived there on April 10<sup>th</sup> 1848. One of the features of the diary is the amount of walking which people had to do - Aughtie walked ten miles from the station to the estate. He met John Gibson, the plant hunter in charge of Chatsworth Gardens under Joseph Paxton, and took up his lodgings with "Dame Wallace", whom he sometimes called "the Old Lady", aged seventy. Next day he was shown round the gardens, which he found exhausting like many another visitor, and he was told he was to work in the Great Conservatory.

This enormous edifice, whose fame spread far and wide, was the brainchild of Joseph Paxton, and was the forerunner of his even more stupendous building in iron and glass, the Crystal Palace. So large was it - 277 feet long by 123 feet broad, with a height of 67 feet - that when Queen Victoria and Prince Albert and their party, including the Duke of Wellington, had visited it in 1843, the whole edifice was reputedly lit by 12,000 oil lamps, and the royal entourage drove through it in open carriages. It was the largest glasshouse in the world. The huge panes of glass, like those in the Crystal Palace later, were made in R.L.Chance's famous glassworks in Smethwick - a fact of personal interest to me since a descendant of the firm, the late Mr Derek Chance, was my Churchwarden for several years in my parish of Funtington in West Sussex, establishing a noted fruit farm there next to my Vicarage.

He records on November 20<sup>th</sup> 1848 "the great water lilly (sic) was illuminated for the Duke, it being fully expanded only in the evening", and on November 23<sup>rd</sup> "Sir W.J.Hooker from Kew Gardens came to see the lilly (sic)". Earlier that month, though his work was principally with plants, Aughtie records for November 5<sup>th</sup> - "Went to the kitchen gardens -was placed in the melon ground under Andrew Stewart - found it better than I expected".

One entry rings a bell - "Smoked the cucumber house – gave it too much, which caused the plants to lose many of their leaves". Not all remedies, even the old ones, are good for gardeners or their plants and fruits! Robert Aughtie retired from gardening in 1861 and went to work for a canal company, in charge of the office at Bromford Junction, West Bromwich. But his short diary shines a torch on the kind of life in which many of our forebears were engaged. "Keep a diary" is a good moral for all gardeners and fruit growers.

**Reverend Canon Donald Johnson**

## **The reduction of water content in fruit to enhance sugar and flavour**

It is always encouraging to receive replies and comments about articles in the Newsletter. Fruit group member Alex Deadman has some interesting observations.

Following on from Philip Wilson's article on the association of russet with flavour in apples (Newsletter #30, February 2006), it is interesting to view this topic from perhaps a wider perspective, specifically the reduction of water content in fruit to enhance sugar and flavour.

For a number of years vine growers have been investigating the effect of water stress, or "partial root zone dryness", on the quality of grapes for wine. By withholding water in the later stages of fruit development, increased sugar and flavour levels have been obtained. This has predominantly been investigated by growers in the hotter climates of Australia, Chile and Spain. An excellent brief overview of this is given in (1). Obviously the trick for vine growers is to achieve the increased sugar and flavour levels whilst maintaining good berry size.

Wine producers in the Verona area of Italy have practised a technique of semidrying grapes prior to fermenting to increase sugar and flavour levels in grapes to produce a strong, intensely flavoured wine called Amarone. Many readers will be aware of the production of sweet wine in Bordeaux from botrytized grapes. In this latter case the grapes have water removed from the fruit by the fungus *botrytis cinerea*. Again both of these techniques rely on water being removed from the fruit to increase sugar and flavour levels.

A further interesting aspect related to apples is in Lawrence D Hills "The Good Fruit Guide" (2). In this he refers to a technique used in the past by apple growers who did not cut the grass in their orchards after about the 2nd week in July, arguing that allowing the grass to grow took up excess nitrogen in the soil. This temporary nitrogen shortage improved both the storage and eating quality of the apples. I have wondered over the past few years, with the current interest in partial root zone dryness in certain commercial fruit, whether it was the temporary water shortage caused by the higher water transpiration of the longer grass rather than the temporary nitrogen shortage that gave rise to the improvements.

All this is fine but what is there anything the amateur fruit grower can do to produce enhanced fruit flavours? Obviously cultivar selection and the best horticultural practices are a prerequisite. To date I have tried withholding water from my blackcurrants and gooseberries, but have only tasted them in the raw state. Although not a scientific study and it is too early to draw proper conclusions I can say that the fruits are certainly less acidic and seem to be sweeter. This year I (or really my wife) hope to conduct a proper culinary test. This year I also hope to encourage grass around my apples and plums with a view to trying Lawrence Hill's suggestion.

Members may like to consider the following experiment. Store a Kiwi fruit for 6-9 weeks in a cool, dry place, and then compare the flavour with a freshly bought shop one. I find the stored fruit much more enjoyable.

As a final thought, the production of fruit with reduced water content to enhance the sugar and flavour levels seems to correspond with the description of "overripe". Such a condition is hardly likely to please the supermarket buyers, and one wonders whether it would also please the RHS fruit competition judges!

### **Alex Deadman**

#### References:

- 1: Agronomics and Economics: Irrigation and Soil management of Grapes, a report from the INIA symposium in Santiago, Chile, by Patricio Trebilcock. see:-[www.newaginternational.com/current/agronomics200603.pdf](http://www.newaginternational.com/current/agronomics200603.pdf)
- 2: Lawrence D Hills; "The Good Fruit Guide"(ISBN: 0905343123). Henry Doubleday Research Assoc. May 1984

# Grapes, local plums and an apple named after Don Cockman

## Report on meeting of the South West Fruit Group 15<sup>th</sup> October 2005

As you may know, any member of the RHS Fruit Group is most welcome to attend meetings arranged not just by the Wisley Committee, but also the regional branch meetings arranged by the South West (SW), the West Midlands (WM) and the Northern Fruit Group (N).

In October 2005 I had the pleasure of attending the meeting of the SW Fruit Group – great speakers and great members made me feel very welcome. The added bonus was an excuse to look round the RHS Garden Rosemoor which boasts some fine fruit growing in situations very much like many domestic gardens.

Displayed round the room were several hundred local Devon apple cultivars, courtesy of Kevin Croucher at Thornhayes Nursery. An amazing sight, every shape and size (and no doubt taste) you can imagine.

The morning speaker was Brian Edwards, nurseryman and keeper of the National Vine Collection of outdoor hardy dessert and wine grapes (over 300 varieties), plus the National Seedless Grape Collection. To hear him speak is inspiring, but to get a chance to taste a wide selection of his grapes is really special. We were spoiled for choice. I note that Sunnybank his Vine Nurseries at Journey's End, Rowlestone, Ewyas Harold, Herefordshire has an Open Weekend on September 2nd-3rd 2006.

After lunch we had the pleasure of listening to a talk by Don Cockman. Don is a professional gardener with many years experience in all aspects of gardening, with a particular interest in fruit growing. His experience is such that he had a regular gardening 'phone in on BBC Radio Devon for many years.

During his talk I noted two fruits that sounded a bit special, malus *Don's Delight* and the plum *Dittisham Ploughman* which seemed to be extremely local to Dittisham in Devon. I asked Don if he would write some notes about these fruits for the FG Newsletter, and here they are.

### **Dittisham Ploughman**

In the 1949 edition of *The Plums of England* H.V. Taylor describes plum *Dittisham Ploughman* thus: '...A plum grown only in the parish of Dittisham in the valley of the River Dart, Devonshire. The origin is not known, but it was probably a chance seedling found in that area..... The fruit is sold mainly in Dartmouth and Torquay. Trees are raised from suckers, and not budded or grafted. The plum is slightly above medium size, red in colour. It is not unlike a roundish Victoria. Juicy, not quite dessert flavour, but makes jam of great quality and colour. A free stone, there is no almond flavour.'

As a native of South Devon I had known of this plum since childhood and the fact that pre-1939 many people would travel to Dittisham at plum time to purchase the fruit from villagers who had trees in their gardens or in some cases in small orchards. Post war building in the village saw the demise of most orchards.

I have one tree in my garden, which I obtained as a sucker from a resident of the village who had seven trees in his garden. Mini orchard perhaps. My tree has cropped so well over the last twenty years and has so far proved resistant to Silver Leaf.

## Report on meeting of the South West Fruit Group 15<sup>th</sup> October 2005, continued

A *Victoria* tree planted at the same time succumbed to the disease after five years and was not replaced.

The tree does sucker freely and I have given away suckers so that the variety is now more widely distributed. I usually pick second week in August in my Torquay garden. It does make excellent jam, and when fully ripe is very pleasant to taste.

There are two other Dittisham plums, the *Dittisham Black* and the *Dittisham Damson*. I have no knowledge of these but I know they are listed by Thornhayes Nursery. Keepers Nursery can also supply *Dittisham Ploughman*.

### **Malus Don's Delight**

Some years ago I was visiting a friend and looking around his garden when I noticed in the garden next door some highly coloured fruits on an apple tree. I asked my friend, a retired professional gardener, if he knew the name of the variety. My friend replied that it did not have a name as it had been raised from a pip some years previously.

I was so intrigued with what to me seemed like a fruit of quality that in due course I obtained some bud wood and ten MM106 stocks from a nurseryman for whom I had once worked.

Eight buds took. I grew on two and passed the others to keen gardening friends. In due course I brought a few of the apples to the attention of Kevin Croucher of Thornhayes Nursery. The fruits were highly coloured that year and I supplied some bud wood to Kevin at his request.

Imagine my surprise when a few years later the apple appeared in the Thornhayes Nursery catalogue under the name, Don's Delight.

The apple is self-fertile and is a fine late culinary variety. In my garden it is disease resistant and keeps well. Last autumn the fruits on my two trees were highly coloured and this no doubt was due in part to the above average sunshine South Devon enjoyed summer 2005.

I have been interested in fruit, and apples in particular, for over forty years, working for nearly twenty years in a private garden with an orchard of some fifty apple varieties.

I write now in February 2006 and this week has seen the last of variety *Idared*, with a couple of dozen *Golden Delicious* remaining from last summer's crop still to be enjoyed.

### **Don Cockman**

Thornhayes Nursery, Cullompton Devon [www.thornhayes-nursery.co.uk](http://www.thornhayes-nursery.co.uk)  
Keepers Nursery, East Farleigh, Maidstone, Kent [www.keepers-nursery.co.uk](http://www.keepers-nursery.co.uk)

## Report on meeting at Wisley, 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2006



Anna Stankiewicz-Davies and Rosemary Ward

The meeting was opened by RHS Fruit group Chairman, Gerry Edwards, who welcomed members and expressed thanks for all the positive feedback that had been generated by the questionnaire that was circulated with the February Newsletter. Gerry reassured members that the Committee would be taking the feedback extremely seriously and would make changes where necessary to improve member's experience of the Fruit Group.

The first change, which was to take effect immediately, was to make sure that everyone knew something about the fruit

growing interests of the Committee. As a start, John Poole, Chairman of the West Midlands branch, and Tony Benham, our new treasurer, gave a brief talk about the fruit that they grow.

Gerry also introduced a new feature for meetings – a lively raffle – which resulted in one lucky member winning a splendid blueberry plant.

Before the speakers for the day got underway Jim Arbury took the opportunity to bring members up-to-date with the latest developments at Wisley, as they affect the Fruit Department, including news that:

- the Wisley vineyard is due to produce its first vintage this year
- a new cherry collection is planned
- there have been some new additions to the apricot collection
- there have been some new acquisitions for the trained fruit tree garden
- they are working on a 'gourmet fruit' garden within the model fruit garden
- two new redcurrant cultivars being trialled – Augustus and Roodneus
- an allotment garden is planned
- replanting of the apple orchard continues, growing spindlebush trees on M26, and that the organic block of apples continues to flourish
- the fruit mount has been removed and will be rebuilt bigger and better on its new site, as a result the cider apples have been moved and will be replanted to align with the new fruit mount

Most important were Jim's wise words about the extremely long and cold winter that we had been experiencing – it's great for fruit. He explained that the cold winter has forced fruit trees to rest, rather than attempt to keep growing which can happen during mild winters. The cold spring had been holding back blossom which means that the trees are likely to fruit better. Also, if the blossom opens later there should be more pollinators around which should improve the fruit set.

Inspired by Jim, we were ready for the first speaker - Anna Stankiewicz-Davies – who talked about Fruit Growing in South Africa, based on her recent visit. She explained that although most people in the UK might associate South Africa with citrus and vineyards, as result of the promotion of Outspan fruit and South African wines, the country is also a massive producer of apples and soft fruit for world markets. She explained that if we think that cold winters, mildew and the odd sawfly or codling moth

is a problem in our own gardens, the natural challenges facing fruit growers in South Africa are a bit more dramatic:

- Fynbos - spontaneous bush and heath fires that burn all living plants as they pass, are a regular occurrence, so much so that some plants have adapted their lifecycle to the point that the burning stimulates seeds to germinate so that the new plant has the opportunity to grow and take up the space cleared by the burning. This phenomenon was shown to great effect on the Kirstenbosch exhibit at this year's Chelsea Flower Show.
- Pests – the snout beetle (like a large weevil) is a major problem, and so are baboons - a challenge in South Africa but a pest yet to cause much of a problem for UK fruit growers.
- Climatic conditions – lack of water as a result of low rainfall which is predicted to drop a further 25% in coming years; strong winds also cause drying and damage to fruit crops; heat, sunburn damage on apples and when the temperature reaches 27<sup>o</sup> the raspberries stop growing and the fruit starts to cook on the canes. This extreme heat also causes problems because the fruit experiences no periods of dormancy. To overcome this some growers actually move their canes into cold storage for a period of time to artificially induce dormancy.
- Soil – as a result of climatic conditions becomes rock hard in many places.

Despite all of these problems the fruit growers of South Africa manage to overcome the problems and produce top quality fruit.

The second speaker was Rosemary Ward, customer services manager and fruit specialist at Gardening Which? Her talk was entitled 'Garden Centres – Pleasure or Pain?' She outlined the background to the magazine and then reported on the findings of research carried out by Gardening Which? in December 2004.

Gardening Which? researchers surveyed 100 garden centres in 20 areas of the country. They were checking for availability of 18 types of top and soft fruit, noting variety, form and price. They also recorded rootstocks of apples.

Nine fruits were designated 'core fruit' the basic types that should be readily available at all good garden centres: apples, pears, blackberries, blackcurrants, cherries, gooseberries, plums, raspberries, redcurrants. Only, 75% of garden centres surveyed did stock all nine fruits.

Researchers noted the narrow choice of cultivars that are on offer in UK garden centres. Of the 3000+ apple cultivars on record, only 84 were found across the 100 garden centres. The average was just 10 different apples. Pears fared no better with just 25 cultivars available, with only 4 in an average garden centre.

Intriguingly, blueberries were available in 50% of garden centres surveyed, up to 24 different cultivars across the sample, a reflection of the interest that has been generated in this fruit as a result of reports of the health attributes of the fruit. However,

Researchers noted the extreme variability in the price of fruit trees and bushes. Information relating to suitability of different cultivars and rootstocks was also variable, as was information on disease resistance.

So, 'Garden Centres – Pleasure or Pain?' Rosemary's conclusion:

- if you are buying raspberries garden centres will probably have a good choice at a reasonable price
- if you are buying apples it is something of a lottery, with prices ranging from £9.99 to £41.99 for the same cultivar on the same rootstock
- so shop around to find the best price
- check labels carefully – you may not always get what you think

**Alan Mansfield**

## Dates for 2006

**Thursday, 22<sup>nd</sup> June, meeting at Wisley**, guests of Fruit Department – topical fruit questions, early strawberries, tour of new glasshouse and trials. *Follow Fruit Group signs on the day for directions for meeting.* **RHS**

**Saturday, 8<sup>th</sup> July, visit Walcot Nursery**, nr Pershore. Organic fruit nursery. **WM**

**Early/mid July, field visit**, date and venue to be confirmed. **SW**

**Saturday, 5<sup>th</sup> August, Summer Pruning Workshop.** Thornhays Nursery, Cullompton Devon, in conjunction with Orchards Live. **SW**

**Sunday, 6<sup>th</sup> August, visit to Adrian Baggaley's extensive fruit garden.** Prize winning fruit. **WM**

**Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> August, visit to Blackmoor Fruit Nurseries**, Hampshire. See commercial fruit production at its best. **RHS**

**Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> August Visit to Helmsley Walled Gardens.** **N**

**Tuesday, 5<sup>th</sup> September, visit East Malling Research (EMR)**, Kent, the principal UK provider of top-class horticultural research and development for the perennial crops' sector, including fruit. **RHS**

**Sunday, 17<sup>th</sup> September, visit to Westlake Farm**, organic fruit grower, Devon, apple growing and juicing. **SW**

**Wednesday, 11<sup>th</sup> October, Wisley, 1.30pm, Mini Talks**, Jim Dalmon on 'Pear Rust'; Paul Alexander on 'Moving a mature orchard'; Jan Lambourne on 'Fruit and the NCCPG National Collections'. **RHS**

**Saturday, 14<sup>th</sup> October, Rosemoor, Mini Talks**, and tasting fruit produce – jams, wines etc. **SW**

**21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> October Harlow Carr Apple Festival.** **N**

**Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> November, Northern Fruit Group AGM and Talk.** **N**

During the summer the Northern Fruit Group is also arranging a **Budding Workshop** and **Fruit Show**, date to be confirmed. **N**

### **Other events**

8<sup>th</sup> & 9<sup>th</sup> July, Summer Fruit Competition, **Hampton Court Palace Flower Show.**

11<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> July, **Great Yorkshire Show**, Harrogate.

15<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> September, **Autumn Flower Show**, Harrogate.

3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> October, **RHS Great Autumn Show**, Westminster.

15<sup>th</sup> October, **Apple Day, Rosemoor.**

20<sup>th</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup> October, **Wisley, A Taste of Autumn** - including Apple Day 2006

21<sup>st</sup> & 22<sup>nd</sup> October, **Apple Tasting weekend, Wisley.** Harry Baker and RHS Garden Wisley experts will be on hand throughout the weekend to advise you on your fruity problems. Apple Bobbing and other activities.

21<sup>st</sup> & 22<sup>nd</sup> October, **Apple Festival, Harlow Carr.**

10<sup>th</sup> & 11<sup>th</sup> November, **Late Apple & Pear Competition**

12<sup>th</sup> December, **Soft fruit pruning, Rosemoor.** Paid for demonstration.

### **RHS Fruit Group (RHS)**

For more information contact:  
Claire Griffiths, 01483 212342

### **Northern Fruit Group (N)**

For more information contact:  
Hilary Dodson, 01943 464325

### **South West Branch (SW)**

For more information contact:  
John Pledger, Treasurer 01805 622493

### **West Midlands Branch (WM)**

For more information contact:  
John Beswick, Secretary, 01604 403115

**The Regional Groups extend a warm welcome to all members of the Fruit Group, whatever their geographical location. Members may attend any event organised by any of the Regional Branches.**

### **YOUR COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

Chairman: Gerald Edwards

Vice-Chairman: Bob Sherman

Secretary: Jonathan Keyte

Treasurer: Tony Benham

Committee members: Jim Arbury (Fruit Superintendent, Wisley), Harry Baker, Peter Blackburne-Maze, Peter Collett, Dr Hilary Dodson (Northern Fruit Group), Brian Fox (South West), Alan Mansfield (Editor), John Poole (West Midlands), Howard Stringer, Peter Smith, Eric Spanier

The RHS Fruit Group Newsletter relies heavily on contributions from members. Many thanks to all of you who have submitted articles, apologies if they have not appeared in this issue. We always need short articles of **100-150** words to fit around longer articles. If you have anything that may be considered for publication, please hand it to me at a Fruit Group meeting or send it to: Alan Mansfield, The Editor, RHS Fruit Group Newsletter, PO Box 74, Hertford, Hertfordshire, SG13 7UG. Telephone: 01992 550175. Ideally, copy should be in electronic format emailed to: alanmansfield@ntlworld.com

Deadline for next issue: 30<sup>th</sup> July 2006

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**Fruit shows and competitions can be great fun to visit and to enter. Anyone who enters the Summer Fruit & Vegetable Competition in July will get free entry to the Hampton Court Flower Show. If you grow top fruit then there is the Great Autumn Show in October or the late Apple & Pear Competition in November. Even if you are only visiting the shows you can still take part. The RHS Fruit Group is planning to attend the major RHS fruit events this year, to spread the word, encourage more people to grow fruit and join the Fruit Group. To do this we need a rota of members who can devote an hour or so to the Fruit Group table. You do not need in-depth technical knowledge – the Wisley Fruit Department team will be on hand for that. If you can help please contact: Alan Mansfield (Hampton Court Flower Show), Gerry Edwards (Great Autumn Show), Julia Mitchell (Wisley Apple Festival)**