



Saving Devon's Treescapes Community Orchard Application - guidance notes



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Thank you for your interest in planting an orchard! We are looking for communities to get involved and help save Devon's precious treescapes. Over five years, the Saving Devon's Treescapes project aims to plant and nurture 250,000 trees outside of woodlands across Devon. Our orchard scheme allows communities to apply for fruit trees which helps wildlife and can provide a wonderful space for communities to come together.

Benefits of orchards

Traditional orchards support a huge variety of wildlife – insects, birds, bees, bats and small mammals and have been designated as a priority habitat in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan because of this.

Community orchards also have many benefits to local people – they can be used for educational visits, events, and they provide an opportunity to learn new skills such as pruning and maintenance of fruit trees as well as jam making and much more!

How to set up a Community Orchard

Identify the land you want to plant on and gain landowner permission. You will need to check if planning permission is required for planting an orchard on the site. There is some information about planning permission for orchards here: [Community orchards: How to guide \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/guidance/publishing-service.gov.uk)

You then need to consider whether the site is suitable for growing fruit trees. Ground and soil conditions should be considered along with utilities checks (overhead and underground services). You can then look at environmental conditions to ensure your orchard will thrive:

Sun

Most fruit trees require 6-8 hours of sunlight for good growth and for fruits to ripen although cooking varieties tend to require fewer hours. Visit your site at different times of the day and note any shady areas where planting should be avoided.

Soil

It is worth doing some soil testing to check the acidity and texture of the soil. Well-drained, uncompacted, loamy, slightly acidic soil is best for growing fruit trees but don't worry if that's not what you have as varieties can be selected for different conditions and soil can be improved over time by adding organic matter (mulch).



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Depth of soil

Fruit trees need at least 2ft of soil. Trees planted in shallow soils may need staking to stop them falling over.

Flooding and frost pockets

Avoid areas that flood as fruit trees will not tolerate being in standing water for too long. Frost pockets tend to occur at the bottom of slopes where there is a wall or hedge. These areas stay frosty for longer than surrounding land. These areas should be avoided as frost can damage fruit buds.

Water

It is essential that you have access to water as regular watering is crucial during the first few years of establishment. We encourage rainwater collection if at all possible.

Layout

Whether you decide to plant in the traditional grid formation in rows from North to South or you wish to have clusters of trees as and where the ground allows, the most important thing is to ensure each tree is positioned to receive as much sun as possible. Spacing is important – MM106 trees should be planted 4-5m apart and M25 trees 8 - 10m apart. We will supply MM106 trees wherever possible as most of the fruit is low enough to pick from the ground.

Fruit trees and pollination

Most cultivated fruit trees are not self-fertile so rely on cross pollination to produce fruit. It is therefore important to plant fruit trees close to one or more suitable cultivars which flower at the same time. Fruit trees are grouped according to when they flower. The groups are:

- 1 Very early; pollinated by groups 1 & 2
- 2 Pollinated by groups 1, 2 & 3
- 3 Pollinated by groups 2, 3 & 4
- 4 Pollinated by groups 3, 4 & 5
- 5 Pollinated by groups 4, 5 & 6
- 6 Pollinated by groups 5, 6 & 7
- 7 Very late; pollinated by group 6



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We will provide trees that will cross-pollinate but if you have any particular preferences of varieties this is useful to bear in mind.

Crab apples and hedgerows to supplement

We offer crab apples to help with apple pollination. Pollen from a crab apple tree will pollinate most apple trees provided they blossom at the same time. Crab apples have a long flowering time of around 3-4 weeks, so they are an excellent addition to an orchard.

We can also provide hedgerow plantings which greatly encourage the number pollinators, encourage natural predators to help rid the orchard of pests. Hedgerows also provide significant wind shelter which can increase fruit crop yields.

Maintenance of your orchard

You will need to ensure the fruit trees are watered during the summer for the first few years.

It is also important to mulch each year. The Orchard Project has some great information about mulching: [The Importance of Mulching - The Orchard Project](#).

You will also need to prune the fruit trees as this increases air flow, helping to reduce infections and encourages the tree to produce more fruit.

Who can apply?

Community groups, education groups including primary and secondary schools and voluntary organisations can apply. Parish and town councils can also apply. Commercial organisations cannot apply. The project covers all of Devon and Neroche in Somerset, we cannot provide orchard trees to those outside the project area.

What is included?

We provide the fruit trees (the number is dependent on how many communities apply. We advise you to apply for up to 25 trees). The trees will be around 1 – 1.5m tall at time of delivery. We will provide 2 stakes, 2 rubber ties and a spiral tree guard for each tree.



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If you require different protection (for example if you have horses/ sheep in the field) you may be able to apply for funding to cover this through our **TreeWorks** grants or you may need to finance this yourself. Please request an application form if required.

We aim to run 2 workshops each year – an online workshop about orchard planning and a face-to-face pruning workshop.

We can also offer an advisory visit if you are unsure how, what and where to plant. Please let us know if this would be of use to your community.

If you would like to apply for community orchard fruit trees, please complete the application form and return to jatkinson@devonwildlifetrust.org with the subject line *Community Orchard application*.



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