

Scotland once boasted fine fruit orchards but they've all disappeared down the years. However, efforts are under way to create new ones across the country, as John Hancox explains

# Celebrating a fruitful Scotland

It's autumn and one of the real joys of this "season of mists and mellow fruitfulness" is undoubtedly fruit. I'm talking here of the apples, pears and plums that grow so well in Scotland.

Keats was of course thinking of English orchards when he wrote that line in his poem To Autumn, but over the past few years there's been a real revival of interest in Scottish fruit growing. Across the country there are schools, towns, villages and communities all planting new community orchards. And there are other projects to map and find a future for existing fragments of former orchards in the Clyde Valley, as well as the Carse of Gowrie.

Fruit growing can be a very personal passion. For me, the interest in growing Scottish apples came about when I saw, or rather smelt, the apple collection at Culzean Castle in Ayrshire. This collection of about 150 apple varieties set out on trestles not only looked amazing, but the smell of apples also hit you full on. It was put together by John Butterworth, the acknowledged expert on Scottish apples, who has done a huge amount to trigger the current interest in fruit growing across Scotland.

That visit to Culzean was in 2004, and it led to the launch of the 'Children's Orchard' project, firstly in Glasgow, and then across Scotland.



The first planting was a tree in George Square, and over the past few years we've planted in hundreds of schools and with many community groups, involving thousands of children planting thousands of apple trees with a small army of volunteers. We're currently working on planting the 'Commonwealth Orchard', which is a Scotland-wide legacy of 2014 fruit trees to mark the Commonwealth Games being held in Glasgow.

Back in 2007-2008, the Children's Orchard got grant support from SNH for a feasibility study to look at rolling out community orchards. One of the conclusions was that a national networking group was needed to bring together local initiatives. This led to an 'Apple Day' at the Holyrood Parliament in 2008, bringing together people with an interest in fruit growing from across Scotland. Following on from that, we established a community-led group called 'Scottish Orchards'. This group aims to support people interested in all aspects of fruit growing across the country and who want to create a 'Fruitful Scotland'.

We also held a recent Scottish Orchards Gathering to celebrate the achievements of the many schools, groups and individuals from across Scotland working to make Scotland more fruitful. Glasgow Cathedral held the event at St Mungo's Museum, which was chosen as a venue because monks planted one of the oldest orchards in Scotland there around 1100 AD. So you can tell that fruit growing in Scotland isn't exactly new!

The Gathering explored the educational, cultural and community value of fruit growing, as well as the unique variety of wildlife linked with fruit trees. While traditional orchards have declined steeply – to the point where there's virtually no commercial apple growing left in Scotland – people are planting thousands of new trees in small orchards of a few trees, or even single trees in gardens. These will create the new orchards of the 21st century across the whole of the country.

Ultimately, the best reasons for planting fruit trees and valuing their produce is because they not only look and smell good, but they also taste great. In addition, children love picking fruit, and the dream is for all Scottish children to be able to pick fruit from the trees they've planted. And, who knows, perhaps they'll bring their own children back to pick fruit from those same trees.

'Apple Days' are popping up across Scotland and are great places to see, smell and taste our many different varieties. Check out where they're taking place by clicking on [www.scottishorchards.com](http://www.scottishorchards.com) or [www.commonwealthorchard.com](http://www.commonwealthorchard.com)

Enjoy!



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The waters of world-famous Loch Ness will be a big draw for paddlers.

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