



### Other orchard habitats

Traditional orchards would have been more than just trees. The way the land was managed lent itself to a range of other habitats, all of which increased the biodiversity of orchards. This often helped the orchard, as the flowers need to be pollinated in order to produce fruit, so if you attract more insects to the area, you'll get a better chance of successful pollination.

You may be very limited with space in the grounds, but it's worth considering if you can create any of the following orchard habitats:

- Soft fruit and berries
- Grasslands
- Wildflowers
- Scrub or hedgerows
- Pond or wetlands
- Old walls
- Rough/uncut grassland edges

They don't have to be huge areas, you'll need to think about how they will be looked after, just like the orchard itself. Also, don't worry about trying to create all of them – a good wildflower meadow will be much better than neglected bits of each.

#### *Soft fruit & berries*

Many orchards were under planted with a range of soft fruit and berries which enabled the land between fruit trees to also be productive. The Forth Valley region was famed for its *groset fayres* which celebrated the areas large gooseberry harvests.

Most soft fruits and berries like sunny spots to help the fruit ripen, but they are tolerant of some shade, making them ideal for planting under fruit trees, which are naturally quite open. This about putting a few currant, gooseberry or raspberry plants in amongst your trees. These can be bought from garden centres for around £5, but you can also get them from fruit tree nurseries slightly cheaper, and be able to source ones appropriate for your area.

#### *Grasslands and/or wildflowers*

Grasslands and wildflower meadows will provide shelter and food for many types of animals, from birds and mammals to insects. All these animals can help the orchard, but in particular, insects will help with the pollination.



If you plant a wildflower meadow or grassland, do bear in mind that they need looking after. They need to be mown once a year (usually around September) and have the cuttings removed, so that there is space for the new seeds to grow. If this doesn't happen, the species diversity will decrease and after a few years, will only be full of the hardy plants that out-complete the others, such as nettles and brambles.

You can create a grassland or wildflower meadow in one of 2 ways. You can leave an area to go wild on its own (you will need to mow it, as above after a couple of years), or you can sow a grassland/wildflower meadow seed mix. The area left to go wild will grow with whatever seeds are already in the soil, so if you are planting in an area currently mown very regularly, you will get a grassland of low species diversity and of little attraction to biodiversity. If you want to sow a wildflower seed mix, a little preparation is needed. The soil will need to be loosened so the seeds can germinate properly – you may be able to do this simply by raking the soil, or you may need to spend some time digging into the ground and creating small patches of soil by turning the existing turf over. Wildflower/grass seeds are best sown in autumn, so they germinate early in the spring, but you can sow them in spring if you need to. Just be wary of any long, dry periods, when you'll need to water the seeds.

Have a look at the Scotia Seeds website for more advice and to see what seed mix would be good for you: [www.scotiaseeds.co.uk](http://www.scotiaseeds.co.uk)



Orchards with grassland and wildflowers

### *Scrub or hedgerows*

Scrubby areas and hedgerows have two main purposes in an orchard. Firstly, if the right species are used, you can supplement your fruit growing; and secondly, they provide shelter and food for a range of birds and invertebrates who will help your orchard to flourish

Traditional hedgerows were used to separate fields in farms and would provide food and shelter for birds which in turn protected crops from pests. They are not used as much with today's farming techniques, but many people are planting them in parks and green spaces and calling them foraging hedgerows. Species such as hawthorn, blackthorn, elder, hazel, rowan, dog rose and bramble provide flowers and berries that are fantastic additions to orchard harvest, guelder rose, holly and ivy, whilst not palatable to humans provide food for birds and insects, whilst the year round shelter provided by the evergreen plants, and brambles offer protection and hibernation opportunities for many invertebrates.



If you want to create a hedgerow in or around your orchard, or you don't have space, a small scrub area, have a look at some tree nurseries, such as Alba trees: [www.albatrees.co.uk](http://www.albatrees.co.uk). They produce cells grown plants of native species so are perfect for our climate. If buying in enough quantity, they are also considerably cheaper than garden centres! It's also worth having a look at the Woodland Trust website: [www.woodlandtrust.org.uk](http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk) as in recent years they have provided free tree packs of around 150 tree to community groups and schools.

#### *Ponds/wetlands*

Ponds and wetlands are a vital part of the lifecycle for all biodiversity, so having one in your orchard will help attract and keep both pollinators and animals that will help control pests to your fruit. They don't need to be large, and don't need to be completely filled with water at all times to be of benefit to wildlife.

If you have an area of the grounds that is often wet and boggy, then this is an ideal place to have a pond and will make the creation of it much easier. All you really need to do it to dig a slight depression into the ground and allow it to fill naturally with water. Make it quite uneven in depth and around the edge so that it can attract as wide a range of biodiversity as possible. These kinds of wetlands are often seasonal, and will dry out during hot, dry spells, but you shouldn't worry about that. They should colonise naturally with plants that can cope with the changes in water level, but if not, you can plant some species bought from garden centres, or a suitable seed mix from Scotia seeds.

If you have very well drained soil and no obvious wet area, you will need a bit more effort and planning for your pond. When you dig your pond, you will need to line it with some kind of pond liner or membrane to keep the water from simply draining through the soil. Make sure you don't just dig a hole, but make it uneven in depth and an interesting shape. Once lined, you should weigh the liner down around the edges with some of the soil you've dug out. This will stop it from slipping, and give any vegetation a substrate to root into. You could consider leaving the pond and seeing what naturally colonises, but it's likely to take a long time if you don't have any wet areas near you, so it might be better to plant with pond edge seeds or plants from a garden centre.

If you are concerned over safety of the children and the pond, please look online for advice on ponds in schools grounds. You could fence off the pond, or screen it with plants to prevent the children going too near it, though working with the children on creating the pond might also help them to be aware of the dangers.



Orchard pond



### *Old walls*

Whilst not what most people would consider a habitat, walls are very important to orchards. When used to enclose an orchard, the walls create a localised micro-climate by sheltering the orchards from winds and by reflecting sunshine into it. This helped keep the temperature warm and stable within the orchard, helping the fruit to grow and ripen.

South facing walls in particular are great for orchards, as they soak up the sun and radiate the heat back into the plants in front of them. They can make a big difference in the cropping yields of some trees, and in parts of eastern Scotland have been known to enable fruit such as apricots and figs to be grown successfully.

As well as helping the fruit trees, orchards provide habitats for a range of other species. They host a variety of lichens, mosses and alpine plants; offer shelter to invertebrates which often pollinate the fruit; and they have the potential to provide hibernation spots to reptiles and amphibians, both of which eat some of the most common orchard pests such as slugs and snails.

Consider building a low wall either around your trees (this will also help protect them from enthusiastic mowers!), or a slightly taller one at the northern boundary to catch the sun. They can be built using any kind of brick or stone – try going for a dry stone wall look, or build up a bank of soil and line with stones to create a stable surface. Alternatively, see if one of your parents has the skills to build you one!



Stone walls in orchards

