



# Community orchards How to guide

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setting up your own community orchard



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## Introduction

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The Government recognises the value for communities of green spaces – parks, orchards, allotments, gardens etc – and, as part of the localism and decentralisation agenda, has committed to measures that will enable individuals and communities to gain access to the land they need. Whether your ambitions are to create or conserve a community orchard or get together with neighbours to maintain the local park or playground where you walk your dogs or just relax with friends and family or play with your children, our suite of guides, on topics such as allotments, playgrounds and nature reserves etc, will help you make the most of the green space in your local area.

This guide is aimed at helping community groups conserve or create community orchards. A compendium of case studies has been produced to illustrate the great work that is going on in communities around community orchards and provide you with some inspiration. These case studies will be updated as new information becomes available.

[www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/orchardscasestudies](http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/orchardscasestudies)



## Community orchards

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### What are community orchards?

An orchard is a collection of fruit and, sometimes, nut trees often planted among grass full of wild flowers. Just as traditional orchards were often the centre of village life and a cornerstone of the rural economy, community orchards are excellent places for people to come together to plant and cultivate local and unusual varieties of fruit trees and to use as the focal point for community activities such as Apple Day (see link below), open air plays, picnics, story-telling events or festivals or as a green haven in which to relax and wind-down.

[www.english-in-particular.info/cg/appleday/index.html](http://www.english-in-particular.info/cg/appleday/index.html)

Thought should be given to the layout of your orchard. Common Ground, the organisation that initiated the idea of community orchards, has plenty of advice on this subject (*Community Orchards Handbook. Common Ground/Green Books, 2011*). The orchard should be open to the whole community, not just those playing a part in its management.

[www.english-in-particular.info/](http://www.english-in-particular.info/)



## What can I use the orchard for?

In 2007, traditional orchards were designated as a priority habitat in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan because of the wildlife – a variety of flora and fauna – that can be supported by this environment – insects, birds, bees, bats, foxes and small mammals as well as wild flowers. Indeed, some community groups choose to keep bees on their orchard to pollinate the fruit trees. In addition to keeping bees for honey production, orchards can protect bumblebees simply by creating a habitat for them to exist. Both honey bees and bumblebees are beneficial in pollinating orchards. The value of bees in pollinating agricultural crops has been estimated between £120 -200m per year but they are susceptible to diseases which can kill them. More information about how community orchards can help with bee-health can be found on the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' web site:

[www.defra.gov.uk/food-farm/crops/bee-health/](http://www.defra.gov.uk/food-farm/crops/bee-health/)

Community orchards are frequently used as an educational resource for local schools and children – see **St Ann's Community Orchard** case study for more information about child-friendly activities. However, community orchards are a great opportunity for everyone to learn new skills – fencing, wildlife watching, horticultural skills gained from pruning and maintenance of the fruit trees and jam and fruit juice making skills, for example, once the fruit is picked. **Bloomfield, New Mills and Waltham Abbey** orchards case studies give examples of some of the activities open to volunteers.

## How do I start an orchard?

The first step is to identify land you want to use for your community orchard. Community orchards can be set up almost anywhere – on or near school grounds, in hospitals grounds, around residential care homes, on council land or land around social housing, on town greens, on derelict sites, alongside paths and on the edge of forests, as well as on allotments and open ground. A good example of an orchard being established in an under-used area of a park is **South Park Community Orchard** detailed in the accompanying compendium of case studies.



Link to case studies [www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/orchardscasestudies](http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/orchardscasestudies)

If you are experiencing difficulty in finding out what land may be available for your community orchard, you may choose to ask your council about land that is available for sale in your area, and visit the following:

- **Landshare**, an exchange website for people who want to grow their own fruit and/or vegetables and those with land to spare – anything from a small garden plot to considerable acres of land:

[www.landshare.org.uk](http://www.landshare.org.uk)

- **The Place Station**, which is a web site that introduces owners of land and buildings across the UK to social and community entrepreneurs with ideas for transforming their local area:

[www.theplacestation.org.uk](http://www.theplacestation.org.uk)

- The Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens are also developing a **Community Land Advisory Service** designed to act as a trusted intermediary and broker between landowners and community groups:

[www.communitylandadvice.org.uk](http://www.communitylandadvice.org.uk)

Where you have identified land that you want to buy which is of great importance to the life of the community, (which could include school playing fields, forest-/woodland, other green space etc), community organisations can nominate it for the local authority to list as an “asset of community value”. Once listed, the proposed Community Right to Buy provisions in the Localism Bill (currently being debated in Parliament) will provide a greater opportunity for you to bid for the land when it is put up for sale. The Community Right to Buy will come into force by April 2012 at the earliest.

Alternatively, you could approach the Asset Transfer Unit which provides expert advice, guidance and support to local people and organisations who want to take ownership and/or management of under-used land and buildings. DCLG has funded the Asset Transfer Unit to develop practical guide for community groups wishing to take on the management of their local public space.

[atu.org.uk/Support/toolkits/communityspaces](http://atu.org.uk/Support/toolkits/communityspaces)

There are also local orchard groups in most parts of the country who can provide advice and assistance.

A number of community groups have developed an interest through a desire to improve nearby derelict land (e.g. **Butterfield Green Community Orchard**). If you are interested in



**Link to case studies** [www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/orchardscasestudies](http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/orchardscasestudies)

doing this, you may be able to exercise the new Community Right to Reclaim Derelict Land (where it is publicly owned). Where you are thinking of using derelict land, you should check the soil first for contaminants -either the land may not be appropriate for use as an orchard or the contaminants may cost a considerable amount to clear.

If you live close to a traditional orchard that is not being maintained, you might want to approach the owner and offer to develop the orchard for the use of the community for the foreseeable future. Your local authority may be able to help if you are unsure who the orchard belongs to. The owner may want to make the agreement formal and you could use a 'meanwhile lease' for this purpose. Locality, a network of development trusts, social action centres and community enterprises helping people to set up locally owned and led organisations, have developed meanwhile lease templates to assist with the production of legal documents, which owners and community groups/individuals can adapt for their own purposes. A meanwhile lease agreement may also be helpful if you are looking to lease land from a hospital or residential care home, or to develop your orchard on forest-/woodland. Whilst few groups are likely to be as lucky as **Ringmer Community Orchard** to whom land was donated by a local farmer, it is always worth approaching such individuals as they may be willing to support you in other ways.

[www.meanwhile.org.uk/useful-info](http://www.meanwhile.org.uk/useful-info)

Alternatively, where the management of an orchard is a service provided by a local authority, for example as part of the management of a green space, community bodies will soon be able to challenge to manage that orchard by using the Community Right to Challenge.

We have provided a separate document detailing additional measures you can use to get access to the land you want:

[www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/greenspacehelp](http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/greenspacehelp)

Community groups can create additional interest in their community orchard through holding Apple Days on or around 21 October or by applying for the Green Flag Community Award scheme. The Green Flag Award is the national quality standard for parks and green spaces. It is run as an annual, peer reviewed, voluntary award scheme. The scheme rewards high standards of management and maintenance of publicly accessible green spaces in England and Wales and the commitment and skill of those involved in creating those spaces. The related Green Flag Community Award recognises the achievements of community groups that own or manage spaces. DCLG currently provides the majority of the scheme's funding. The scheme recognises the achievements of community groups that own or manage public spaces and helps to ensure quality management on an on-going basis.

[www.keepbritaintidy.org/GreenFlag/Awards/CommunityAward/Default.aspx](http://www.keepbritaintidy.org/GreenFlag/Awards/CommunityAward/Default.aspx)



Link to case studies [www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/orchardscasestudies](http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/orchardscasestudies)



St Ann's, South Park, Butterfield Green and New Mills community orchards, Sunnyside Rural Trust and Waltham Abbey Gardens Orchard are all Green Flag Community Award winners. Although there is normally an entry fee to help cover the judging expenses and administration of the scheme, for 2010-2011, applications from community managed spaces were free.

### **Will I need planning permission?**

Statutory allotments, growing plots (i.e. non statutory allotments), and orchards would generally be classed as agricultural in planning terms. The use of land for the purposes of agriculture does not require specific planning permission – see Section 55 of the *Town and Country Planning Act 1990*, (the 'TCPA'). Using land for agricultural purposes is defined in paragraph (a) of Section 336 to the TCPA.

However, not all uses related to agriculture are classed as 'agricultural'. For example, an orchard run primarily for education purposes and public events is likely not to be classed as agricultural, and therefore planning permission to change to this use from another would generally be required. It is for the Local Planning Authority, in the first instance, to determine what the use of land is on a case by case basis and whether, what is proposed, would bring about a material change of use. If you are unsure about whether an intended use would constitute development, you should discuss this with your local planning authority.

You may also need to discuss tree protection with your local planning authority. Trees in orchards may be protected by tree protection orders (TPOs) or because they are in a conservation area and the authority's consent may be required before working on those trees.

### **Where can I get funding to start my orchard?**

**Natural England, Environmental Stewardship:** An agri-environment scheme that provides funding to farmers and other land managers in England:

[www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/farming/funding/es/default.aspx](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/farming/funding/es/default.aspx)

**Department for Environment, Farming and Rural Affairs, Tree Planting Grants:**

Groups that are interested in planting trees may apply for grant funding from today. Projects will be encouraged in areas of greatest need. So far, around 25 per cent of applications to DEFRA have been for community orchards:

[www.defra.gov.uk/news/2010/12/02/tree-plant/](http://www.defra.gov.uk/news/2010/12/02/tree-plant/)

Details on how community groups can apply for funding can be found at:

[thebigtreeplant.direct.gov.uk/funding.html](http://thebigtreeplant.direct.gov.uk/funding.html)

The attached information also provides links to additional, potential sources of funding:

[www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/greenspacefunding](http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/greenspacefunding)



## Sources of additional information and guidance

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**Common Ground:**

[www.england-in-particular.info/orchards/o-comm2.html](http://www.england-in-particular.info/orchards/o-comm2.html)

**Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens:**

[www.farmgarden.org.uk/home/local-food-project/growing-trends/631-community-orchards](http://www.farmgarden.org.uk/home/local-food-project/growing-trends/631-community-orchards)

**Orchard Network:**

[www.orchardnetwork.org.uk/](http://www.orchardnetwork.org.uk/)

**Green Flag Award Scheme:**

[www.keepbritaintidy.org/GreenFlag/](http://www.keepbritaintidy.org/GreenFlag/)

**Woodland Trust:**

[www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/en/planttrees/community-orchard/Pages/community-orchards.aspx](http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/en/planttrees/community-orchard/Pages/community-orchards.aspx)

**The Campaign for Real Farming:**

[www.campaignforrealfarming.org/2010/06/community-orchards/](http://www.campaignforrealfarming.org/2010/06/community-orchards/)

**The National Trust:**

[www.nationaltrust.org.uk/main/w-chl/w-countryside\\_environment/w-nature/w-nature-orchard-restoration.htm](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/main/w-chl/w-countryside_environment/w-nature/w-nature-orchard-restoration.htm)