

# CSGGA Newsletter

## November 2022



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## All About Apples (and Pears)

Gerry Edwards

Gerry is a well-known horticulturalist and fruit specialist with many years of experience and is Chairman of the Royal Horticultural Society's Fruit Group, a Vice Chairman of the Royal Horticultural Society's Fruit, Vegetable and Herb Committee and a member of the Royal Horticultural Society's Fruit Trials Forum.

Gerry started his talk by encouraging us all to grow apples, advising that they would grow anywhere and were great fun. Paradoxically, he is allergic to apples but this doesn't put him off! He gave us a quick canter through the history of apples, and suggested that the old apple trees of the past, such as Cox's Orange Pippin and James Grieve were too tall for modern gardens. Modern apples, grown on suitable rootstocks, are the way forward. It's possible to include apples in most gardens for decoration, cordons and stepovers, can both produce good crops. To see some fantastic shapes, he suggested a trip to West Dean Gardens in Sussex.

To control the size of apples and pears, they should be grown on dwarfing rootstocks. The first half of the twentieth century saw much investment and research into apple rootstocks at government research stations, East Malling and Merton. These new rootstocks were recognised by their prefix M for Malling and MM for Malling-Merton. They remain the most popular rootstocks used today. Gerry suggested that M26 is good for good soils, MM106 where the soil is not so good, and advised against using M9 or M27. Although M9 is the most used rootstock in the world, its best for Kent loams but not on our clay/chalk soils. Pear trees should be grown on Quince A or Quince C. For more guidance on rootstocks go to [Rootstocks for fruit / RHS Gardening](https://www.rhs.org.uk/gardening/fruit/fruit-growing/rootstocks-for-fruit)



When choosing apples, consider how many you want to plant, their function and how productive or decorative you want them to be, but bear in mind that some such as Blenheim Orange, bear their fruit on the tips so are not suitable for shaping. If growing apples in pots, which Gerry would not recommend, they would need repotting every two years and require root-pruning and John Inness No.3 or compost made from equal parts of garden soil and leaf mould with some added blood, fish and bone to act as a slow release fertiliser.

Best varieties would be genetically dwarf apples from America. Figs, on the other hand, are ideal for pots as they like the dry conditions.

Gerry stated categorically that there is no such thing as a self-fertile apple, despite what the books say! All apples and pears need pollinators. Most need only one pollination partner, but triploids need 3 so are best avoided, unless you can accommodate 3 trees to cross pollinate. Pollination groups stem from Victorian times and the groups are beginning to blur with climate change. Groups are based on flowering times, which has no bearing on harvest time. Apples have 7 pollination groups and pears 4. It's necessary to choose trees from the same group or those either side i.e. to pollinate an apple in Group 2, you could choose to plant another from Groups 1, 2 or 3. However, where gardens are close together, it is very likely that a neighbour will have a pollination partner - bees fly great distances. In cold areas, or frost pockets, choose trees from later pollination groups. Gerry's rule is to always buy from a reputable nursery or garden centre, don't be seduced into buying one from the supermarket.



When planting, prepare the ground carefully and thoroughly, clearing all weeds and other growth, ensure there is good drainage and work in plenty of organic matter, if the soil is very heavy or light. Never replant fruit trees into the same site as one that has been removed as they are likely to grow badly or not at all!

Once established, healthy trees need little maintenance, other than pruning and checking for pests and diseases but it is important to take good care for them in the first few years, weeding throughout the growing season: removing fruitlets, to allow roots to establish; watering in the first year; applying mulch to conserve moisture and nutrients; and adding a yearly feed of blood, fish and bone (or seaweed fertiliser for vegetarians) at the start of each growing season. In very exceptional dry weather it might be necessary to water established trees but it's advisable to leave the tree to seek out its own moisture from deep within the soil.

"Pruning is NOT difficult!" says Gerry. Pruning cordons and espaliers is very simple, he says! In summer, July for pears, August for apples, remove damaged or diseased wood, then all new growth from the main stem to 150 mm/6" to a bud, and any new growth to a spur of a branch of the main stem to approximately 25mm/1". When your tree grows to the height you want, cut the leader back to 1/3 of the new growth. Thereafter cut back all new growth to one bud. Similarly, take out damaged or diseased wood for dwarf bushes, then they should be pruned to allow light to enter the crown and only cut back new growth if the tree is not a tip bearing variety. Large, established trees are best pruned in winter. Watershoots should be removed straight away, ideally torn off.

Apples and pears will need to be thinned if insufficient have fallen during "June drop" to get larger fruits and prevent the tree having a rest the following year. If a tree crop is too heavy, it can cause the limbs to break. Thin apples and pears to 2 per cluster, dessert apples should grow 50 mm/2" apart and cooking apples 75mm/3" apart.

Gerry manages pests and diseases organically and ensures good hygiene by clearing away fallen fruit and leaves as soon as possible. Create habitats for beneficial insects such as earwigs, as they can eat 1000s of aphids a night. Horticultural grease bands can be used in late October to stop winter moths climbing trees



but offer no protection against problems such as codling moth or plum moth. For more info see [Controlling pests and diseases without chemicals / RHS Gardening](#)

Gerry advised that apples that ripen before October will not store, some late pears might store for a short time. Avoid damaged fruit, store in a cool, airy shed in shade. Only the UK classifies apples as cooking and dessert apples, traditionally, cooking apples were those that were too large to fit in a woman's hand. The UK has more apple varieties than anywhere else in the world.

Gerry finished his talk with a list of apples and pears he would recommend. This is attached to the newsletter. He is a mine of information and very happy to help others. See his website for how to contact him.

[Gerry Edwards Orchard Services - Our Home Page \(gerryedwardsgardenservices.org.uk\)](http://gerryedwardsgardenservices.org.uk)

## Monthly Cup



The monthly cup was won by Edward Townsend for his magnificent potted cyclamen.

Each month we encourage you to bring along a plant, flower, fruit or vegetable that you have nurtured and are proud of. It's the taking part that matters. You have to be in it to win it!



## Next Month's Christmas Party

We are holding our Christmas Party at The White Hart Inn, Three Households, Chalfont St Giles on Thursday 8th December at 6.30 pm for 7.00 pm. A 2-course menu will cost £28 while a 3 course will cost £30. You will be welcomed with a complimentary glass of wine or soft drink. Further drinks including tea and coffee can be ordered, but this will be at your own expense. There will be a customary table quiz and raffle for your enjoyment.

**To book a place contact Sam Patel [sumitrardpatel@outlook.com](mailto:sumitrardpatel@outlook.com) 01494 875319**

**The menu can be found on our [website](#).** Cheques should be made out to **CSG Gardens Association** and sent to Margaret Dykes, 4 Roughwood Fields, Roughwood Lane, Chalfont St Giles, HP8 4AA please, or BACS transfer 20-02-06 account 80256587.

**Places are limited so first come first served. We need confirm numbers so book as soon as possible please.**

## M's Action Diary for November

- Penstemons can be trimmed now to tidy, but delay main trim until April/May.
- Plant tulips.

- Leaves left under trees and shrubs can look attractive and may be left to rot down naturally. In areas such as rockeries, leaves can cause plants to rot, and also provide hiding places for slugs and snails, so remove them.
- Give all clematis a feed of well-rotted manure or bonemeal.
- Insulate outside taps.
- Keep supplying wild birds with seeds, nuts and water.
- Cut back long leggy stems of bush and shrub roses.
- Tidy perennials by cutting down the stems to ground level, add to the compost heap.
- Check tree ties on stakes, in case they need loosening or tightening.

## Green Gardening Tip – Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, Recycle

Think about refuse/reduce/reuse/recycle in your garden. Buying things for your garden is a huge industry, and not always necessary. Do you have household waste containers like yogurt pots and milk cartons that would make good growing pots? Can you make your own plant feeds with nettles or comfrey? Have you tried saving your own seed? Do you need to buy new tools or can you repair, share or source second hand? Minimising the number of new materials that have to be brought in is an important part of organic growing and a great way to reduce the carbon footprint of your garden. [COP26 – what can we do to play our part? | Garden Organic](#)

## Amersham in Bloom



Amersham has been crowned the overall Winner at the 2022 UK Finals of Britain in Bloom. In addition to this amazing accolade, Amersham was also named the winner of the Children and Young People's Participation Award and the RHS discretionary Sustainable Gardening Award. We could learn a lot from our near neighbours. I would highly recommend a visit to the Memorial Gardens in Old Amersham, it looks good at virtually any time of the year but the enthusiastic volunteers had also created a jubilee pollinator bed as well as planting and caring for Met1 in Amersham-on-



the-Hill, Willow Wood and Pondwicks Community Orchards. The hanging baskets in Old Amersham and planters throughout the town were also very impressive. Well done, Amersham, very worthy winners.

## Your CSGGA Committee

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