

and twigs. Prune out the worst bits and if the tree is very badly affected consider removing it and planting a more suitable variety.

Your trees may be overloaded with parasitic mistletoe which can eventually kill trees. Prune out all diseased wood and take off as much mistletoe as possible; remove it and burn all diseased prunings immediately.

Are your trees congested or well pruned?

Your aim is to create an open canopy so air can circulate, reducing disease and allowing sunshine in to open the blossoms and ripen fruits. Don't rush at this task - taking too much wood out can send a tree into shock. It's better to prune slowly over time but always in a tree's dormant season. Take out branches that criss-cross each other; then progressively establish a good shape – this may be over a 3 year period.

What varieties do I have?

If you have no information to hand you will need to observe each tree from blossom-time through to autumn fruiting to get any clue. Take dated photographs as a record; then you will have to taste the fruits, consult books (there are some good ones about) and maybe also seek expert advice!

Identification

There are some general rules of thumb but it is important to note down when the tree flowers and when each variety is fully ripe (i.e. the

apple pips are dark brown) as this can vary from early August through till late November.

- Cider apples may be sweet or sharp in taste but dry out your mouth due to their tannin content; it feels as though you have chewed a wad of cotton wool!

- Cooking apples are usually medium to very large in size and of good acidity.

- Eating apples are generally much sweeter but many have very good acidity too.

There are two main sources to help you with identification:

- The National Fruit Collection at the Brogdale Horticultural Trust in Kent run a fruit identification service. See <http://www.brogdalecollections.co.uk/fruit-identification.html> for full details.

- Apple Day Festivals held on or around the 21st October each year all over the country often at National Trust properties (<http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/>), garden centres or local Orchard or Sustainability Groups. Many of these have experts who can identify apples and certainly a lot of enthusiastic and knowledgeable members/staff.



● Apples can be eaten or made into cider or apple juice

See <http://www.vigopresses.co.uk/AdditionalDepartments/Useful-Information/Useful-links/Orchard-Community-Groups> for a selection of community groups.

What can I do with a bumper crop?

Apart from gorging yourselves on fresh fruit, storing perfect fruit in well-ventilated cool conditions, and cooking apples for freezing (but there is only so much that can be fitted into a freezer!), what else can you do with the surplus fruit? The answer is simple: you can make cider or apple juice for long term drinking and enjoyment. Full details of how you can go about that can be found at <http://www.vigopresses.co.uk/AdditionalDepartments/Header-Content/Make-apple-juice>. ●



● You will need to observe blossoming to tell what varieties you have

Helpful reading

On identification

Apples a Field Guide by Michael Clark (awaiting reprinting but may be held in some libraries)

The West Country Pomona by Liz Copas – a comprehensive guide to cider apples

On pruning & orchard management

The Fruit Tree Handbook by Ben Pike RHS
 Growing Fruit Fruit by Mark Diacono (River Cottage Handbook)

On juice & cider making and fruit juicing equipment

Craft Cider Making by Andrew Lea – the “bible” of cider-making
 Juice & cider making equipment - full domestic range at <http://www.vigopresses.co.uk>