



Photos: Michael Eleftheriades



Putting the Community into Henrietta Community Orchard

MARIA SCHLATTER, FRIENDS OF HENRIETTA COMMUNITY ORCHARD

Small traditional orchards used to be a common feature of cities as well as the countryside, and community groups are increasingly rediscovering the beauty and benefit of these wonderful neighbourhood assets. So it was, in late March this year, that a group of engaged Hampstead Garden Suburb residents came together to create a new urban community orchard in Lyttelton Playing Fields.

About thirty Friends of Henrietta Community Orchard of all ages, and Councillor Rohit Grover, planted the first set of trees in the new community orchard near Bishopswood Bowls Club on a sunny Sunday morning. It was a wonderfully communal and cooperative event, with everyone having fun and working like clockwork. The winter rains had stopped but the ground was still soft – ridiculously muddy in places – and digging holes for the supporting tree cage posts was an effort but not quite as daunting as anticipated. We managed to complete the different stages of tree planting within a couple of hours, leaving enough time for a social tea break.

This orchard is a wonderful initiative to help reverse the decline of our natural cultural landscapes. According to a 24th March Guardian article, orchards used to be a defining feature of neighbourhoods, part of the fabric of everyday life. A recent National Trust study reported that 80% of small traditional orchards in this country have been lost over the past century. Tom Dommett, the head of historic environment at the National Trust said: "Their loss affects local culture, how we all experience landscapes. The loss of traditional orchards is also nature's loss; these orchards can be great places for wildlife like flies and bees, with the gnarled trunks and branches creating the perfect home for rare species."

The aim is also to inspire local gardeners and ensure the continued availability of traditional fruit varieties that grow well in an urban setting and are no longer easily available in shops. Many of them have a special connection to the original fruit trees donated by Henrietta Barnett to HGS householders.

The orchard layout mainly follows a traditional pattern with spaced out trees, plus two rows of fan and espalier trees that will make access easier for children.

It was quite tough choosing the appropriate fruit varieties as there are thousands of amazing cultivars available in this country. Several people have asked what we have planted, and most of the trees are apples, by far the most diverse cultivated fruit species: Core Blimey, Adam's Pearmain, Chiver's Delight, Gascoyne's Scarlet, Golden Noble, Tydeman's Early Worcester, Pitmaston Pineapple, Merton Russet, Charles Ross, Ellison's Orange, Peasgood Nonsuch. The pear varieties are Robin and Concorde, the plums are Marjorie's Seedling, Czar and Victoria, and there will also be a Vranja quince and a Nottingham medlar gracing the front of the orchard.

If you want to join the Friends of Henrietta Community Orchard or just be kept updated, please email fruitorchard@hgsra.uk.

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