

DOLAU-HIRION FRUIT TREES

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Growing fruit trees in Wales

Let's be honest, it rains a lot in Wales, too much for apples, pears and plums to be considered an economic crop by modern standards in most counties. Yet a century ago, when transportation of produce was more difficult, almost every farm had a small orchard growing many varieties of fruit for domestic use and for marketing locally. As the trees aged and production became uneconomic these orchards fell into decay. Most are long gone and those remnants that have survived are now only distant echoes of a more self-sufficient age.

What constitutes a good orchard site?

Ideally, the orchard should be sunny, sheltered, south facing and no more than 400 feet above sea level. The soil should be a slightly acid, well-drained, medium loam at least 18" deep; well, that rules out most of Wales! Avoid frost pockets if you can. On windy sites, use medium-sized trees and consider planting a windbreak to protect them.

Choosing varieties

Moist conditions favour the development of fungal diseases whilst wet weather keeps the bees indoors and pollination suffers. We cannot change the weather but we can choose varieties that are resistant to scab and canker and that have a good track record. By visiting local orchards, inspecting trees and talking to their owners we have been able to draw up a short-list of successful varieties, both old and new. These are featured on our separate variety list. We cooperate closely with the Marcher Apple Network. Each year they come across old varieties with Welsh names that appear to have no English equivalent. Many of these are disease-free and regular heavy croppers, such as Marged Nicolas from the Dinefwr area and Pig aderyn from Cardigan. Why not give them a try!

Choosing rootstocks

Apples and pears vary considerably in their ability to root naturally so they are grafted onto rootstocks of known vigour. When choosing rootstocks you must consider what you are going to do with the land under and between the trees. If you are going to graze the orchard you will need vigorous, tall trees to prevent the animals eating the branches. If you are going to mow, then smaller trees would probably be more suitable. Tall trees will need wider spacing. The following table will give you a general idea which rootstock you will need for your situation.

Rootstock table

Rootstock	final tree height	trunk height	planting distance	permanent staking	management	situation
<i>Apples:</i>						
M25	25'	6'	25-30'	No	grazing or mowing	traditional field orchard
MM111	20'	4½'	20'		mowing	paddock or large garden, espalier
MM106	12-15'	3'	15'			
M116	10-12'	3'	12-15'			
M26	8-10'	3'	10'	Yes	keep clear of vegetation	small garden, cordon etc
M9	6-8'	2½'	10'			
<i>Pears:</i>						
Seedling pear	30'	6-8'	30-40'	No	grazing	traditional field orchard
pyrodwarf	15-20'	4½'	20'			
Quince A	12-15'	3'	15'	No	mowing	paddock or garden
Quince C	10-12'	3'	12'	yes		

For traditional orchards choose apples grafted onto M25 and MM111. These are often the only rootstocks that grant-aided schemes will accept. In a large garden choose MM106 or M116. For small bushes and trained trees such as cordons and espaliers buy varieties grafted onto M26 or M9. In general, choose Pyrodwarf or Quince A for pears and St. Julien A for plums - both are semi-vigorous.

Pollination

Most fruit trees are open-pollinated and require a partner of a different variety that is flowering at the same time for successful pollination. Triploid varieties, like Bramley's Seedling apple and Jargonelle pear, produce very little pollen and cannot fertilise other varieties so you will need a third tree.

Pollinating insects such as bees are also important. Spring frosts can kill the flowers and damage the fruitlets whilst low temperatures can reduce pollination. These frosts are not always predictable so we recommend that you spread the risk by choosing pairs of varieties with the same or consecutive pollination group numbers eg. 2 each of groups 2, 3, 4 and 5.

If your land is a natural frost pocket, choose varieties from groups 4 and 5. If you live at over 800', the average temperature is lower and the summer shorter so avoid varieties that require a long ripening period such as Cox, Sturmer Pippin, Golden Delicious and most pears. The old apple varieties Tom Putt and Mere de Menage appear to crop satisfactorily even at 1000'.

Placing an order

We usually have around 1000 potted and 1500 bare-rooted fruit trees ready for sale from the end of November each year on a range of rootstocks for different planting situations.

Apples growing in pots can be planted at almost any time of the year but bare-rooted trees must be lifted when dormant and are usually only available between December and the end of February. Please let us know your requirements by the end of August so that we can order bare-rooted plants of those varieties that we do not stock or which we do not have on the correct rootstock.

Grafting service

Do you have an old apple or pear tree you would like to rejuvenate? Send us graftwood and we will graft it for you onto whatever rootstock you choose.

Prices (to March 2013)

Home-grown maiden apples and pears in pots from	£12.50
Home-grown 1-2 yr apples and pears in pots from	£15.00
Bare-rooted maiden apples and pears from	£15.00
Plums, gages, damsons and cherries from	£15.00
Grafting service	£15.00
Mail order	£16.50 + VAT

How to find us

About 2 miles from Llandeilo towards Carmarthen on the A40 is a pub called The Cottage Inn. Almost opposite this is a minor road signposted to Capel Isaac. Follow this road for 2 miles until you reach a long straight stretch of road. We are at the end of this on the right opposite Maesteilo Care Home.

WE LOOK FORWARD TO SEEING YOU!

Paul and Lynne Davis

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