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Not every orchard is this prosperous: many are under threat today

An orchard revisited

Garden designer Sadie Stowell explains how she's recreated a traditional orchard scene with a modern twist for this month's Hampton Court Flower Show

When my family and I moved into our smallholding on the borders of Herefordshire and Worcestershire, the front 5 acres of land were completely overgrown with thistles, docks and brambles, tangled among broken lines of ageing fruit trees while the fields to the rear of the house were grazed by sheep. Then, one day, we found an

old aerial photograph among some papers, showing that the whole of our 15 acres had once been a fruit orchard producing apples, pears, plums, damsons and cherries for commercial sale. In the past, such an orchard landscape would have been a common feature in many areas of England.

Realising that a similar picture of decaying orchards and diminishing



Above: Sadie was joint winner of Channel 4's 2005 *Great Garden Challenge*

fruit production was happening countrywide, I began to think about the wider issues surrounding fruit production in the UK. Then, while at college and university, my successful involvement in Channel 4's *Great Garden Challenge* in the summer of 2005 whetted my appetite for creating show gardens.

Juicy job

Pulling these strands together into a single unified concept took some time, but eventually I was ready to present my design to a sponsor



and was fortunate in gaining the interest and backing of the company Copella Fruit Juices.

'Branching out with Copella – The Apple Juice Garden' draws inspiration from apple juice production and aims to raise awareness of the plight of our dwindling apple orchards.

Within the design, three mature apple trees form the main anchor points and, while the garden can be appreciated for its pure aesthetics, it also incorporates the story of the journey from the promise of apple blossom in spring through to the production of golden juice in autumn.

Three trees

My initial task was to find some suitable apple trees to be the three anchor points of my design.

Luck happened to be with me as some fruit growers nearby were about to grub up an unproductive orchard of Cox's apples.

I was invited to choose which trees I wanted prior to its destruction – so the three in the Copella garden are the sole survivors of an orchard now grubbed up and burnt to ashes.

Next came the delicate operation of trenching, lifting and root-balling the gnarled old trees and removing



Above: Spring apple blossom heralds a promise of the autumn harvest to come

them to be cared for until their debut at the Hampton Court Flower Show.

I realised the design with the help of landscapers Antworks and Leaver Landscapes. I also found the perfect metalwork sculptor in Lawrence Walker, whose work is organic and sensitive with great presence and energy – and I knew he would interpret the essence of the Copella garden in the way I had envisaged. His great arching pieces of metalwork lend the garden weight and impact, forming a cradle for

Right: A plan of Sadie's Hampton Court garden which includes a sculptural water feature, sunken area and circular seating

Below: Sadly, unproductive orchards are at risk of being grubbed up leading to a drop in UK fruit production



the sunken seating area with its impressive water features created by local ceramicist, Pierre Williams. Pierre's monumental and textural pieces bear the fruit that is the inspiration for the garden. Within the circular seating area of natural Indian sandstone is a curved wooden seat, another individual piece of art, created from locally sourced oak off-cuts by Huw Morris, a man with a great love and feel for the materials he chooses to work with.

Plant tapestry

Wrapping around the seating area, the planting beneath and between the old apple trees is intended to create a subtle textural tapestry. Drifts of grasses and cool umbellifers are interwoven with the rich fruity colours of blackcurrant, bronze and burgundy, with added zest from

sharp orange and lime green.

Almost a third of the plants chosen are grasses (*Stipa gigantea* and *S. tenuissima*, *Briza*, *Deschampsia* and *Pennisetum*). Another third are perennials and shrubs, while the remainder are annuals that are sown, grow and flower within a year.

This planting is not intended to replicate the species found in a typical apple orchard, but rather to take the spirit of orchard flora and translate it into a contemporary garden setting. I hope that it will provide a visual feast for the eye while also telling the orchard story of the journey from fruit to juice.