

1. Animated spaces

Orchards are essentially productive places and need to have life in them. In this old damson orchard with its fine half-timbered garden building, the presence of a rustic seat and ducks roaming between the trees conjure up a perfectly bucolic image.



# Orchards & trained fruit

Whether your plot is large or small, fruit trees can add another dimension to your garden, bearing blossom in spring and the sweetest of crops at harvest time



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Say 'orchard' and a romantic image of gnarled old trees with grass beneath and grazing sheep, ducks or chickens is conjured up. Old orchards can be wonderful, atmospheric spaces, and even when no longer productive, the misshapen forms of the trees, their decay and sense of antiquity deserve to be celebrated. I believe that orchards have a longevity that we can turn into something incredible and rather than trying to rejuvenate an old one by grubbing it out and re-planting the voids, I prefer to grow trained fruit in another part of the garden and find other ways of bringing new life in.

To breathe new life and vitality into an old orchard so that, once again, it becomes a space that's used, you need to introduce a diversion or a design element, something that will draw people there. This applies to new orchards as well, especially if they lie on the outside of the garden. It could be a wonderful tree house for children to play in, or a magical turf maze, or simply a shallow dip in the grass that becomes a fire pit or a hidden picnic area. You might create something more structural such as a contemporary earthwork, maybe a circular grass mount, or a crisply



## DESIGN IDEAS

### 2. Trees with personality

The individual character of these trees brings atmosphere to an old damson orchard in Herefordshire. It is worth sourcing old fruit cultivars from your own locality whenever possible – various regional societies can help and advise.



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### 3. A focal point

A circular turf maze at Chenies Manor in Buckinghamshire demonstrates how beautifully this ancient form of ground pattern sits within an orchard setting. Made to a 16th-century design, it adds a note of playfulness and draws you into the space.



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▷ angled bank that winds its ways between the trees, creating a ribbon of green, planted with wild flowers. If you're lucky enough to have water nearby, it could be a small clear oval pool or a serpentine rill. An orchard, old or new, is one of the most romantic places for an informal swimming pool, one where the grass comes right up to the sides. Or, by complete contrast, imagine the effect of a modern avenue of topiary domes of beech or yew that cuts across the random planting of ancient trees and leads to a bench. You've brought order and symmetry among the ramshackle old trees,

and this harks back to traditional ways of growing fruit from many centuries ago.

*Contemporary orchards, big & small*  
Geometry can be the basis for a small modern orchard, in town or country. At a garden in Devon we made a contemporary orchard with a square of 16 young damsons planted in a grid of grass paths. Each tree grows out of a 2m x 2m square of clipped copper beech and in spring, the effect of the new beech leaves, the damson buds and the grass is amazing. A variation on this for a small town garden might be nine trees of a single cultivar (say, pears,



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### 4. A ladder

An old fruit-picking ladder leaning against a tree in an orchard has a function both practical and aesthetic. It is a lovely object in its own right, a form of sculpture, but it's also real and there for a purpose.

### 5. Earthworks

Grass mounds create an elevated vantage point. In this case, a sinuous grass bank is dramatically used to form the central, organising feature of a new orchard.

### 6. Water

If you have a source nearby, water – here in the form of a gently curving rill – is a simple but powerful way of bringing life and movement into an old orchard where space has been opened up between the trees.

### 7. Ancient fruits

Traditionally, an orchard was supposed to contain a walnut tree, a quince, a medlar and a mulberry. All are ornamental and can perfectly well be incorporated as single trees into the design of any but the smallest garden.

quince or medlars) planted in a square and growing out of chippings. To give it an even more contemporary feel, you could limewash the trunks of the trees, as they do in hot climates to deter ants.

### Flowers

Wild flowers are almost always an integral part of the traditional orchard, with snowdrops, aconites, cowslips and primroses in succession through spring. At my last garden, Guanock, I grew camassias in the apple orchard; they come out at exactly the same time as the apple blossom, making a lovely blue haze below the pink blossom. Flowers will bring in the

bees and help pollination, and you might keep one or two hives in the orchard. A different way to introduce flowers into a modern, grid-based orchard is to grow them in a checkerboard pattern. This is what we have done in the Devon orchard, where squares of white crocuses alternate with copper beech squares beneath the damson trees. It's a simple but effective idea that can be developed in many ways.

### Trained fruit

If you have a relatively small space with no room for a full-scale orchard, growing just a couple of trained fruit trees will probably supply you ▷



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“ If you have a relatively small space with no room for a full-scale orchard, growing just a couple of trained fruit trees will probably supply you with plenty of fruit ”

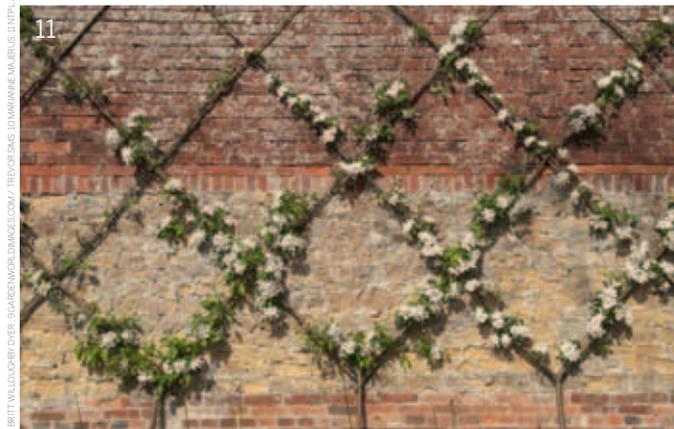
**8. A fruit-bearing archway**  
An apple arch is planted at the intersection of four paths in the kitchen garden at Chatsworth House in Derbyshire. Tunnels and arches need to be grown from rootstocks vigorous enough to attain the necessary height and spread.



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▷ with plenty of fruit. Espaliers, cordons, fans and Belgium fence are all lovely forms for wall-training, and any aspect wall will do, even one that's north-facing. The Victorians extended the season and paced the ripening process by deliberately growing fruit on different aspects. Or there's the Morello cherry (*Prunus cerasus* 'Morello'), always a choice candidate for a blank north wall.

Pear or apple tunnels and arches can be used as design elements within the garden, creating subdivisions and axes that are both beautiful and productive, framing paths and entrances. With its tiny footprint, a post and wire structure for

trained espaliers can form a neat, semi-transparent division between garden areas or act as a living boundary in a small town garden. Step-over apples provide an excellent solution for introducing fruit into the smallest of spaces, used as edging to paths or beds.

In a small town or country front-garden, instead of planting a purely ornamental tree, imagine how much more life the space would have with a beautiful, free-standing, goblet-trained apple or a pair of pyramid pears, one on either side of the path. □

NEXT TIME Design ideas for changes of level

**9. Free-standing trees**  
This free-standing apple is being trained into a goblet shape and looks equally at home in small gardens in both town and country. Their restricted forms are productive, provided you grown them on a reasonably vigorous rootstock.

**10. Tall espaliers**  
Espaliers grow well on house walls; I prefer pears, because they give you the height and can grow up to three floors. Certain cultivars are better than others on a north wall and a good supplier will advise.

**11. Belgian fence**  
Apples and pears can be wall-trained to form a Belgian fence, a criss-cross pattern that is highly decorative, though slow to achieve. Alternatively, make a decorative living fence by training them on an independent framework of posts and wires.

**Stockists**  
[www.jaspertrees.co.uk](http://www.jaspertrees.co.uk)  
A nursery in Leominster, Herefordshire, that supplies more than 100 apple cultivars, plus pears, plums, grapes, cherries and damsons, all bare root. Delivery across the UK.  
[www.readsnursery.co.uk](http://www.readsnursery.co.uk)  
Reads is an old, established nursery in Norfolk. It can advise you on cultivars and pruning, and has a wonderful selection of fruit (especially figs), including some ready-trained trees.