



BECOMING A FORCE FOR NATURE

Keeping It Growing! Gartmore Primary – Gartmore, Stirlingshire, Scotland

Back in 1991, National Apple Day (a campaign run every October by environment charity Common Ground <https://www.commonground.org.uk/>) caught the imagination of Mrs Miller, the then Headteacher of Gartmore Primary school in Stirlingshire. Excited by the opportunity to engage children in their local environment, help them learn where food comes from, connect them with the natural world and teach the curriculum outdoors, the idea around planting an orchard on an area of the school field was born. Mrs Miller said she knew very little about and fruit growing, but she has always had a passion for the environment and a strong belief in the value of learning outdoors.

“Learning together is so important,” she says “in the beginning staff weren’t the disseminators of information, we were the enablers. Children asked the questions and we worked together to find out the answers.”

Involving all the children was crucial in deciding where on the school field to initially plant fruit trees. “Children would tell us about where they played different games at different times of the year, which helped us map out the field and identify the best location for the trees.” Initially, a small amount of funding was secured from a local association and four trees were planted. Over the years this has increased to 20 and most are Scottish specific varieties. In the beginning all the pupils were split into groups to help monitor, maintain and care for the trees over the course of the year and, as it grew, the orchard became a key outdoor learning resource in the school. “Biodiversity monitoring, measuring girth, width and height, pollinating insects, research, cooking, outdoor art, food miles and climate change – you name it, we’ve done it based around our orchard!”



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Every October since 1991, the school has celebrated Apple Day and involved the local community in the event. Over the years, classes have been involved in producing a pack of year round learning activities for other schools, writing regular updates in the school newsletter and village magazine, pressing apples to make juice, selling fruit in the village shop and sharing their knowledge at events involving other communities. The success of the orchard at Gartmore has also been recognised by others, for example parents have become involved in helping prune and maintain the trees and the pupils were asked to get involved in a large scale community planting project near Loch Lomond as part of the millennium celebrations. "I remember once we were sent a scion from a Forester on the Isle of Mull who had heard about our orchard," says Mrs Miller "The current Headteacher, Mrs Buchanan, is just as enthusiastic about the orchard as a learning resource, with Mrs Miller still playing a part in supporting the Eco Committee on a weekly basis. They both agree on the following tips:

Top Tips

- Start small and build as confidence and use increases.
- Involve the whole school community and share the learning.
- Involving the children in every aspect helps embed a sense of ownership and pride in what is achieved.
- Orchards can be used all year round as an outdoor learning resource – be creative in your approach.
- Consider carefully where to site your trees so that they are protected from damage, but that staff and children can still access them easily.

Curriculum links

- **Maths & numeracy:** count the number of fruits that form on your tree from fruit set to harvest – chart how this changes and calculate the survival rate.
- **Science:** Investigate the insects, birds and mammals living in your orchard ecosystem and draw food chains to show feeding relationships.
- **Literacy:** explore the weird and wonderful world of apple names and write a poem, rap or short story.
- **Technologies:** design and make long-lasting variety labels for your fruit trees so you can easily see which is which.
- **Social studies:** research the apple varieties available in your local shops. If there are non, interview the shop keeper to find out why.



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