



# BECOMING A FORCE FOR NATURE

## Normand Croft Community School – Kensington, London

The Orchard Project works with schools each year as part of our community orchard programme; primary, secondary and special schools. We believe that all children should have access to the magic of orchards, however small, in their own grounds.

*“From the planning and fruit-tasting of the consultation to the planting and caring of the trees – this has been the most wonderful learning journey! Many of our staff hadn’t considered using the outdoor space for teaching subjects like maths and literacy, but now they’re enthused and can’t wait to get out – and importantly they are sharing ideas with each other. And just to think, this was an unused area with nowhere to plant, and now it’s a beautiful orchard where the children love to come and learn!”*

**Annie Walker, Outdoor Learning Project Leader**

In 2016 we were pleased to secure a grant from the Ernest Cook Trust to launch a new school orchard project.

The grant allowed us to work Normand Croft community school in Hammersmith & Fulham. The school had an area in mind for the trees - a disused concrete playground. The only problem was that there was no soil to plant them into! With the Orchard Project’s expertise however, a plan was hatched to create a container orchard, transforming a barren, unused space into a thriving, living learning area!



Thanks to support from our key partners Learning through landscapes, The Ernest Cook Trust and The Orchards Project.

[tll.org.uk](http://tll.org.uk), [theorchardproject.org.uk](http://theorchardproject.org.uk), [treecouncil.org.uk](http://treecouncil.org.uk),

<http://ernestcooktrust.org.uk/>



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The school carried out a skills audit and found that there was parent working in construction who was happy to build some large, wooden containers based on The Orchard Project's specification. Slow-growing varieties were chosen on semi-dwarfing rootstock so that the trees would not grow too big. Both children and staff took part in a consultation about what to grow.

The project spanned one year, covering the whole seasonal orchard cycle. A twilight CPD session around using the outdoor space and orchard for teaching a wide range of curriculum topics was held for teaching staff. This enthused the teachers to explore the existing space more widely and encouraged them to consider how they could teach outside in a hands on, experiential way. A whole school assembly introduced all pupils and staff to the project and allowed the local press to come and take photos of a 'longest apple peel' competition!

Over the following year the pupils helped to plant and prune the 12 trees, took part in orchard mini-beast hunts, created tree care signs, and used the orchards to study topics such as 'life cycles', 'food chains' and 'The British Isles'. They also used pruned branches to create art and the 'June drop' of fruit for outdoors, hands-on maths lessons. They've sampled sweet, medium and sharp single variety apple juice and have learnt about the many different varieties traditionally grown across the British Isles, plotting the origins of each on a map.

The school held a successful 'Apple day' event where many apple-based treats were baked and sold, raising valuable funds for future orchard additions. The pupils learned how to use a traditional press to make their own delicious apple juice and discussed this as a future enterprise idea.



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## Top tips:

- You don't need a huge space in your grounds for an orchard! In fact, you can have a 'mini orchard' with just five fruit trees and this example shows that you don't even need bare ground – with careful consideration and planning you can plant fruit trees in large containers
- A container orchard will need slightly more aftercare work in the following years due to the limitations imposed on the growing roots, so be prepared to water and feed more than you would with trees in the ground
- A whole-school assembly is a great way to get pupils and staff enthused about the project – why not invite a local orchard expert to come in and talk about the benefits of a school orchard?
- Try to situate your orchard as close to the school building as possible; you may have space at the far end of the playing field, but in reality, that distance may become a barrier to taking classes over there to teach. Being closer to the building may provide additional microclimate benefits such as wind protection and higher temperatures
- Why not carry out a 'skills audit' of the wider school community to see if there are any skilled people who may like to help out with the project? In this instance, one of the parents was able to build the containers with an additional function of seating around their edges, saving the school lots of money!



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## Curriculum links box

- Maths & numeracy: compare the yield of different trees and varieties in terms of weight and number. Calculate the average yield per tree and weight per fruit
- Science: observe the different flowering times of different species and varieties and explore why they might be different and the impact of weather and climate change on flowering
- Literacy: write and produce a play, performance or puppet show about apples and their mythology, with characters derived from the names of different varieties - then perform it in your orchard
- Technologies: process and preserve your fruit harvest in a range of ways such as drying, juicing, jams and chutneys
- Social studies: investigate the culture and traditions associated with fruit from the different parts of the world represented in your school



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