

ENHANCING THE EXPERIENCE AT PICK-YOUR-OWN FARMS

People visit pick-your-own farms for more than simple food gathering. They come for the whole experience and there are many simple ways that the farmer can enhance this. By boosting your visitors' enjoyment of their trip, you will help them to establish a bond with your farm.

Most PYO farms are havens for nature and wildlife. They offer winter cover in perennial crops and many sheltered nesting and breeding sites. These are characteristics you should capitalise on.

Help your visitors know about the wildlife on the farm. For example, you get hold of some old bird books and make up a few boards of pictures of the birds which visit the site. Try and keep it genuine and avoid sightings of golden eagles, bitterns and the like! If you are uncertain about the species on your farm, most areas have bird watching or ornithological clubs who would love to come and do surveys for you.

A similar picture could be made for mammals such as hares, bats, hedgehogs and weasels etc.

Provision of a few nest boxes doesn't cost the earth and a lot of these birds will eat crop pests and weed seeds, as well as the occasional fruit...

You could put labels indicating the plants in your hedgerows and late mowing can encourage a few areas of wildflowers, however it is important to know the difference between wildflowers and weeds.

If there are a few trees dotted about the farm, bring them into the picture. A simple sign telling people what species of tree it is and what it might be used for is easily made. If you are lucky enough to have a pond put information up about it and possibly make a dipping platform. However do be alert to possible health and safety risks – ponds are not playgrounds.

There is plenty of scope for developing this theme with sign posted walks where a map is given and guided walks, where a bit of information is handed out. It isn't difficult to put together a bit of a handout. Don't think just because you know something that your visitors will – assume nothing.

People like to gather information and learn and they are fascinated by the way food is produced. The farm visit is a chance to widen their interest. For example posters can be made up of planting and other jobs such as pruning raspberries and gooseberries. Many farms have some good crop information and recipes but a bit extra about planting dates, crop renewals and future projects will all add to the experience.

Most people carry digital cameras these days or a phone camera. Providing the setting for a few photo opportunities, such as outside fruits you can put a head through, is always popular.

If you are growing late crops like plums, sweetcorn and pumpkins, where there isn't much interesting to see during the early part of the season, label them up with a photo or two so people know what's coming. You could also offer to send a postcard letting people know when a particular crop is ready.

By definition, the people who have made the effort to visit a pick-your-own farm will be keen to become more informed. If you can satisfy their hunger for knowledge as well as strawberries, they are far more likely to come back to you in the future!



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