

## **A good time for farmers to consider planting more orchards**

THE area of orchards in Wales is creeping up. From an all time low of just 100ha (247 acres) in 1981 the area has increased to about 400ha (988 acres).

Now is a good time for farmers to consider planting more orchards. Consumers are looking for more seasonal and local produce and apples remain one of Wales' favourite home produced fruits.

CALU Horticulture Consultant, Chris Creed said, "Orchards are useful to the landscape and the environment. They provide birds and mammals with food, nesting sites and shelter. Orchards can fit in with agri-environment schemes such as Tir Gofal, while heritage variety orchards can be an asset to a farm."

Mr Creed said, "For best yields a sheltered site less than 150m above sea level is needed, perhaps a little higher on good sites. In more exposed areas, windbreaks can be planted to provide some shelter. Apple trees need about 300mm of well drained soil with pervious subsoil for anchorage.

"Stony soils are not a problem and poor soils can be improved with FYM. Soil analyses need to be carried out before planting: the pH should be around 6.5. The trees need to be kept weed free for the first few years. Spacings are from 5m by 3m for dwarf trees to 10m square for traditional undergrazed trees."

Varieties need to be robust and, where possible, resistant to scab, mildew and canker. Newer selections, including Braeburn and Pink Lady should be looked at with caution. Avoid single varieties as pollination is needed. There has also been a resurgence of interest in other traditional tree fruits such as damsons, plums, pears and cherries, all of which have traditional Welsh varieties.

CALU organises hands-on training in grafting and budding, planting and management, and restructuring of old orchards and also provides information sheets. Information and support is also available from The Welsh Perry and Cider Society [www.welshcider.co.uk](http://www.welshcider.co.uk). For further information and useful contacts visit [www.calu.bangor.ac.uk](http://www.calu.bangor.ac.uk)