

Bees in the trees

Whether you're a honey nut or an apple jack, there are delicious things to try at the Hive Honey Shop in London, and lots to learn about making them at Beeheaven Farm Orchard

PHOTOGRAPHS MICHELLE GARRETT WORDS JACKY HOBBS



You could be forgiven for thinking that the delightful emporium of The Hive Honey Shop was dedicated solely to the best of bee produce, but behind the sticky delights, soothing salves, lotions and potions, there's a flurry of additional activity every autumn, and new flavours to savour as scores of old English apples come tumbling, bouncing or bottled into the shop.

It's a chicken and egg situation - well, bee and apple tree, and here the honey bee came first. Now, however, the two are intrinsically linked, forming a unique symbiotic partnership that produces fabulous treats for all, whether you drink the sweet nectar of 76-variety apple juice or drip dollops of golden orchard honey on your toast,

TIME TO SETTLE DOWN

James Hamwell, a third-generation bee-keeper, used to avidly produce honey and other beeswax products from many 'migratory hives'. His beehives worked fruit farms or took residency in bee-keeping friends' plots, moving from time to time as circumstance dictated. Tiring of ▶

LEFT Hives are best placed in the orchard to aid pollination.

BELOW The beauty of apple blossom. **RIGHT** The tools of the trade - a ladder, canvas carrier and sturdy boxes are all you need to bring in the harvest.







ABOVE James' son Max gets involved in picking the apples. **BELOW, LEFT TO RIGHT** Ripening crab apples; malus trees heavy with fruit and ready for harvesting in October; 'Gascoigne Scarlet'; a way to display - the pleasant country sight of a basket of apples.

nomadic hives, James seized the opportunity to buy a four-acre derelict plot in Kingswood, Surrey. He scooped up all his hives and settled them into their new home, where he quickly discovered that local bee nourishment was lacking. Thus, the idea of the apple orchard was born.

James loves apples, and when researching suitable and interesting varieties for his hives, he unearthed a plethora of great-tasting and historically intriguing gems. With help and a little education from The National Fruit Centre at Brogdale, he acquired relevant knowledge and skills such as fruit-tree grafting, and set out with a fistful of pencil-like sticks to plant the Beeheaven Farm orchard-to-be.

SAVOURING HISTORY

Some 13 years later, he has 76 different varieties of apple trees, mainly, but not exclusively English. 'Decio', said to be the first apple introduced to Britain from Greece, 'tastes terrible, hard and horrible, but is interesting for its provenance'. There's a prized cutting direct from Isaac Newton's actual theory-inducing tree of 1629 - 'The apples are huge and heavy, and if one fell you would certainly wonder what hit you!'

'Howgate Wonder' holds the record for the biggest apple in the world, and James' trees are now so laden with heavy fruit that the branches sometimes break. He measures them each fall but, so far hasn't reared a world beater.

A personal favourite is 'Oaken Pin', a peculiar-shaped apple with crisp white flesh and great flavour. There are many more; red, green, yellow, cookers and eaters, large and small, chubby and round, elegant and ovate, each one's existence enabled by the bees.

And they in turn are happy with more than 200 apple trees bedecked in beautiful springtime blossom, spilling with nectar. The trees are pollinated, the fruit is set. Meanwhile, satisfied bees produce lots of delicious apple orchard honey. The perfect partnership - problem solved.





But James now finds himself with a glorious abundance of apples. So with a little help from DEFRA, as custodian of a fantastic heritage collection of apples, James was permitted to diversify and transform his apple harvest into liquid assets: golden apple juice, a uniquely blended nectar that is the essence of 76 varieties. Pure liquid gold.

FAMILY FIRST

Come harvest time, the whole family roll up their sleeves. Wife Ute and eager children Julia and Max get picking and squishing the tactile, gleaming, sun-polished apples. They fill baskets and buckets, and make their way from the top of the orchard to the lodge at the bottom. 'Apples make it into family pies and chutneys,' James says. 'There almost comes a point when you can't face one more apple-anything,' he jokes. From the lodge, they are tumbled and crushed before being scooped into gauze-lined acacia wood presses, which slowly squeeze out the bubbling juice. This is then collected and bottled. Nothing added, nothing taken away - apple juice, pure and simple.

The juice makes it to The Hive, where Max and Julia have a pocket money stall outside the shop. Regulars buy up their favoured tippie, while newcomers enjoy tasters and inevitably walk away with a bottle under their arm. Throughout the months of September and October, harvested apples cram the shop; curious, ready-to-bite, delicious fruits, whose nature and name change daily depending on what's ripe for picking. All that's left is for you to do is make a visit to take advantage of this glorious two-month taster, and sip some pressed apple nectar or try some tempting bee treats.

The Hive Honey Shop, 93 Northcote Road, Battersea, London SW11 6PL. James also teaches regular bee-keeping courses, with one day of theory and one day putting it all into practice down on the orchard. Tel: +44 (0)20 7924 6233 or visit www.thehivehoneyshop.co.uk

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT A small selection from the harvest; apples are first roughly machine chopped; then they are layered between pressing cloths and placed in the acacia wood press to extract the nectar; ending up as bottled juice, available from the Hive Honeyshop. BELOW Delectable and delicious 'Charles Ross'.



CONTACTS

LEARN MORE ABOUT APPLE ORCHARDS

- **Visit the Cider Museum** in Hereford. Learn about the history of cider making, explore original cider champagne cellars and equipment, a cooper's workshop and a vat house. Tel: +44 (0)1432 354207. www.cidermuseum.co.uk
- **Become a member of a conservation charity** such as The East of England Apples and Orchards Project (EEAOP), to guarantee a future for local orchards and orchard fruits. You can also help by buying fruit trees, taking part in a workshop or apple day, or helping to survey orchards. www.applesandorchards.org.uk
- **Pick your own apples** from local independent orchards such as Clive's Fruit Farm in Worcestershire. Many producers, like him, also make cider and apple juice to sell in farm shops and at farmers' markets. www.clivesfruitfarm.co.uk
- **Go on a fruit-tree grafting course** with Sarah Juniper of The Apple Factor in Gloucestershire, who specialises in old apple varieties, trees and fruit. Tel: +44 (0)1453 545675. www.sarahjuniper.co.uk