

The
Cidermaking
year

2004

By Rose Grant



Cider by Rosie



The Cidermaking Year by Rose Grant

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JANUARY

From UKCider

WASSAILING

People hereabouts insist on wassailing being done on the eve of old twelfth night. A friend of mine is so insistent about this that I've moved my wassail to twelfth Night so that I can go to his on the Eve! We will have the guns. There is so much pheasant shooting around here just now that a few extra bangs will go unnoticed.

Our wassail went very well on Saturday evening. There was a good window in the weather for the orchard ceremony. About 40 people came including two ladies with violins and an old chap with a clarinet. This meant that the song was well supported and everybody sang well. Two shotguns were fired over the tree tops and next morning I found a dead pigeon. A good or ill omen, I know not! Afterwards the mulled cider went down so well by the fireside that the wassail song had to be sung again. A cidery friend of mine brought me a present of a three handled wassail mug, so this was put to good use. I was really pleased with this because I didn't think it was possible to get them any more. If anybody wants one, he got it from New Forest Cider at Burleigh. Wassail,

Rose.

Wassailing tends to be a chilly business that requires warm clothing and warm spicy ale or cider to keep body and soul together. It is an old country custom that goes back to our anglo-saxon ancestors, that was carried out in fruit growing parts of the Country. Wassail is a salutation that goes with drinking a toast. Today we might say "Good health' or "Cheers".

The Apple has always been an important crop for food and drink and was especially so in ancient times. People were more superstitious then and they felt that by drinking a toast to oldest tree in the orchard and presenting it with gifts, it would look after all the other trees and ensure that they produced a good crop. The gifts are by tradition, toast soaked in some of last Autumn's cider. The toast is placed in the crook of the tree by a young girl who is deemed to be the Apple Maiden. She wears a white dress and has a garland in her hair. Wassailing also implies singing and many songs for the occasion originated in all the fruit growing areas especially the West Country. There are also various rhymes that were used and like the songs the theme of them all was to encourage a good



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crop in the year ahead. When the singing and or the poetry is over, guns are fired over the treetops to frighten off the evil spirits. It is a bit of fun and nonsense that makes a good excuse for a party as the orchard bit is often followed by a generous supply of mulled cider back at the house. We had a great time this year. It is good to have a bit of fun in the dour old month of January.

Rose.

GRAFTING

I have thought for several years that I'm probably grafting too late as I do it in early May. My success rate is only around 50%. I will take advice and try it in March this year. I thought that May was the best time because it was in May a few years ago when I went on a grafting course. We students massacred some unfortunate farmer's trees, then top grafted them with a new variety. I was so proud of my work that I went back a year later to see how the grafts had taken. I was somewhat mortified to see how few of them had! I had been most careful to get the cambium layers in close contact as directed, but perhaps it was really a bit too late in the season. I will let you know how I get on this year. I have some wonderful cider, made from a wild tree, that is already good to drink, so I have just got to propagate it for my orchard.

Rose.

It was interesting to hear about the various methods of grafting. I was taught by Les Davies who used to be the Nursery manager for Showerings. He was very much in favour of using the half inch plastic grafting tape instead of raffia and wax. The idea was to tightly bind the tape over the whole length of the graft. this not only provided a strong support for the union, but if done carefully made it fully waterproof as well. If he needed to seal anything he said that he had found ordinary builders water based bitumastic paint worked as well as wax. He used this mostly for sealing the stub ends of branches that had been saddle grafted.

Rose



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FEBRUARY

From Ukcider

SCRATTER WOODWORM

Having been impressed by Andrew's high falutin chemistry, I wondered if he or any other Group member, knows of a treatment for woodworm that is not toxic to humans. I have an old wooden scrapper mill that is riddled with the little perishers. I would like to put an end to their little game, without jeopardising my cider.

Rose

Thank you all for your suggested remedies. I have taken the mill to pieces and already used the most powdery parts for firewood, so the useful parts that are left could be put in my chest freezer. This could be stage 1, followed by the soak in metabisulphite. I like that idea, as it will also kill any other ancient undesirables in the wood! I can't imagine that any would be left after that, to benefit from a stage 3, euthanasia by Vodka, but I will bear it in mind. What I have come to realise is that the wood worm is especially partial to oak when it has been continually soaked in apple juice!

Thanks again, Rose.

I was sad and indignant to hear of the problems that some have had with licensing, especially since I am hoping to follow in their footsteps. I know a chap in west Dorset who sells his cider at farmer's markets and he did not seem to have much trouble getting the license. However it does cost him £5 a time as he has to apply for each and every market that he goes to. I had the impression that it was just a matter of red tape, so was aghast to hear of your outright refusal. Is this another post code lottery? What a load of nonsense it is. If only the licensing were as straight forward as the excise duty waiver for small producers, it would be more realistic. I am determined to get there somehow. Having seen how people here enjoy real cider when they taste it, having only experienced the supermarket stuff, I know there is a market out there. I feel as if I'm on a mission to get proper 100 % juice cider more widely appreciated. This year I only have 70 gallons to dispose of, but my orchard crop increases year on year so I have got to get organised fairly soon. As you know Roy Bailey successfully sells his cider wholesale. I am hoping to be able to do this, at least to begin with. The problem of course is that it could mean a lot of legwork finding favourable outlets. Your experience at your local real ale pub, is far from encouraging! Dont let the beggars grind you down.

Rose



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Someone mentioned the Parliamentary Cider group. Can you explain their function? Are they connected in any way to Ukcider, or are you hoping that one of the members might also be following topics in our group? It would be nice to know who these MPs are. Then perhaps some of us could do some lobbying.

Rose.



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MARCH

From Ukcider

OAK BARRELS

Any of you cider makers within striking range of Babcarry Somerset on the look out for barrels? Mr Beaton of Deer Park Farm, Babcarry, has a consignment of 46 gallon, oak, ex- whiskey barrels, newly arrived from Scotland. He is selling these for the remarkable price of £20 each. [Garden centres also sell these for water butts at between £50 - £70 and Vigo have them at £40.] The ones that I bought have dates on them between 1990 to 1995, so there should be plenty of life left in them. Their freshness is not in doubt. My garage smells like the distillery that they came from! Mr Beaton's phone no. is 01458 223141. I would be interested to hear views on the best way to keep these barrels until they are used for cider. I have heard that they can fall apart if allowed to dry right out. Is it best to fill them with water or just spray them periodically?

Rose

There is certainly plenty of alcohol in these barrels. I didn't think I would get fed up with the smell of whiskey, but I have! I will be glad to get them out of the garage. I have just the place for them outside, alongside the North wall of my barn.

Rose

WELCOMING A NEW MEMBER

Welcome to Craft Cider Making! I can tell from your description that you have definitely caught the bug and the fascination of it all. The point when you really get hooked comes when you taste and enjoy what you have made yourself. The satisfaction is immense and just leads you on to make more and experiment with different varieties and blends. I never thought that cider could be made with eating apples until I tried Ashmeads Kernel as a single variety. It is great and I do some on its own every year now. Good luck with the Cox's. I tried a bottle of Thatcher's single variety Cox and found it tasty and enjoyable. the only thing I did not like was that they had made it very gassy.

Cheers, Rose.



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Sheppy's single varieties are outstanding. After trying a dozen bottles from their web site, I was so impressed that I ordered three more Dabinett trees and introduced a further three of Tremlett's Bitter, to my orchard. I especially liked the Dabinett, it had a full fruity, rich flavour. I had not made Dabinett as a single variety before, so I decided to give it a go last Autumn. It looks and tastes promising. Interesting to hear that Waitrose sell the Sheppys. Our nearest supermarket is Tesco and they only sometimes have Thatchers, which are not as good. I will have to have a look in Waitrose in Dorchester next time I'm there.

Rose.

I would recommend "Cider and juice Apples" by R R Williams to anyone wishing to grow cider apples. It has been the most valuable book that I've had over the last 10 years or so and I still refer to it often. My favourite pages are those of Table 10 which lists the vintage quality cider apple varieties with their characteristics. This has played a big part in the choice of trees for my own orchard and has been most useful. The book is a mine of information on all aspects of orchard practice, albeit from a commercial viewpoint. I have recently bought Liz Copas' new book, "A Somerset Pomona". This is also very informative concerning the characteristics of cider apple varieties and has the great bonus of a superb set of colour photos of all those described. I especially liked her section on apple identification, which works well with the photographs. When I took some unknown apples to our local "Apple Day" last autumn, I was somewhat amused to see the apple expert, Harry Baker, was using it as his main reference for identifying cider apples. I think Liz needs to produce an expanded edition to cover the non Somerset varieties.

Rose.

Vicky's experience with the magistrates confirms what a bad joke it is at present. I rang the magistrates licensing office here to discuss the procedure. It was immediately clear that the pompous lady who answered did not even want to discuss cider licensing with me at all. She said I would only be able to deal with them via a solicitor since "everything has to be properly tied up with the Police and the Fire Service[??] etc". I said that I didn't think the amount of cider I am likely to sell would run to that sort of expense! Next I rang the Licensing Dept at our local Council. There was a much friendlier response altogether. I was told that they would be dealing with the licensing from 2005 and they hoped that it would be simpler than at present. However the lady said they had no firm details from the Government as yet so she was unable to give me any further information. It looks rather as if it is all still in the melting pot. I think it would be a good thing to write to the Parliamentary Cider group [see Andy's posting of 10 Feb]. If as many of us as possible were to do this



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we might just help to ensure that the new regime is more favourable to the small producer. I also wonder whether CAMRA have been able to exert any pressure to help our cause. Real cider is certainly in the same position as was real ale when CAMRA came to its rescue in the 60's. Any CAMRA members know anything about this?

I have just received the Dorset Magistrates Licensing guide book. It is not an "easy read", to put it mildly. I can see now why they expect applicants to use a solicitor! I have decided to wait until next year and see what happens when the Council takes over. It could hardly get worse. It seems from what I read, that they would be involved in any case, with their planning, building regulations and consents as well as environmental and health and safety issues. Lloyd George has a great deal to answer for! I shall just be a wholesaler this year. I presume it is possible to sell wholesale to one's friends, given that the quantities are large enough. Can someone advise me what the minimum legal quantity is for wholesale?

Rose



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APRIL

From Ukcider

BLOSSOM

I usually find single varieties so tasty that they are gone before I get round to the blended. I am looking forward to my trip to Herefordshire next weekend to see the blossom and sample a few ciders, here and there. I will have to be careful not to sample too greatly, as I intend to take my bike and cycle the Orchard Route. Cycling can get very wobbly! Hope the weather stays fabulous, like now. The blossom will be a wonderful sight.

Rose.

GRAFTING SUCCESS

We had an interesting exchange on this site early this year, about methods of grafting and the best time to do it. I had previously only achieved about 50% success by grafting in April and May. Someone suggested that February and March are better. I am pleased to report that this is very good advice. I grafted in late February this year using the whip and tongue technique with plastic grafting tape. Every one is a winner! I had also tried to add Crimson Bramley to my standard Bramley by rind grafting in previous years, without success. This year I put the variety on the ends of small diameter young wood using Whip and Tongue. This has also worked 100%. I wonder if the fact that the scion wood was fresh from the donor trees, instead of being stored for later use, has any thing to do with it. Whatever the reason[s] I am delighted.

Rose

CONTACTING M P

I have petitioned my MP on his own website. This has been acknowledged by the House of Commons website, but it looks computer generated. If I do not hear anything from the man himself in the next few days I will try an old fashioned letter to his home address. I have also been in touch with Common Ground. This business is the very antithesis of all that they have been trying so hard to achieve since they instituted Apple Day about 14 years ago. they are predictably annoyed and are conducting their own campaign.

Rose



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MAY

From Ukcider

STOKE RED

As previously mentioned, Stoke Red is the Worrier. Mine looked so dead when all else was romping away and blooming better than ever this year. Now I am happy to say that the leaves have started to show themselves on good old Stoke at last. He gave me some delightful self keiving cider last year and I'm hoping that he will do it again!

Rose.



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JUNE

From Ukcider

APHIDS

Is anybody else experiencing a plague of aphids on their apple trees? After our wonderful warm may weather the blossom and subsequent fruit set has been superb, so it is really sad to see so many leaves curling with a heavy infestation of little brown aphids. I suppose the good weather has favoured them too. I was really tempted to spray them even though it would have been the first time in 14 years. However when I took a closer look I noticed that the branches were covered with ants going to and fro into the curled up leaves. There were also a good number of ladybirds enjoying the same pastime. I will just have to hope that nature will rule in my favour and that the trees will not suffer a virus from these pests.

Rose

LADYBIRDS MAY BE WINNING

I was disappointed to learn that the ants do not kill the aphids. However I have read that ladybirds have a prodigious appetite for the little beasts. My daily inspection of the trees shows that the problem is decreasing, so something is either having them or they are flying away. I like to think that the ladybirds are winning in spite of the marauding ants. I can't bear to spray ladybirds. Every so often I collect a matchbox full and let them loose in my conservatory where they do a remarkable job against whitefly. This is an aphid that is now resistant to most pesticides. The ladybird is indeed a most valuable insect. I notice that it is now possible to buy them for 50p each from garden biological control suppliers! I can understand your viewpoint Stephen as you grow eating apples and these days if they do not look good, they will not sell. We have the supermarkets to thank for that. Luckily with cider apples, appearance is unimportant. The quality of the juice is paramount and I think that means no pesticides. An interesting thing I have also noticed is that the aphids are quite fussy with their cider sap. They seem to adore Dabinett and Tom Putt but can't be bothered with Redstreak and Michelin. Kingston Blacks are also almost unscathed.

Rose



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SCOTTS NURSERIES

Scotts Nurseries of Merriot may not have a website but their prices take some beating. I paid £9.50 each for some beautifully grown, 1 yr cider whips this year. I had investigated Web nurseries beforehand and found prices around £ 14 for the same. Some of these also only had a few cider varieties available whereas Scotts has a large selection. Well worth the trouble of old fashioned mail order, in my opinion.

I could also add to the Kingston Black discussion that I find these apples are prone to being scumped. I have a public footpath through my orchard and the problem is that KB apples look so beautiful when they are ripe. Last year I had a tree stripped bare overnight. The thieves must have been disappointed when they got home and tried to eat them!

Rose

DAMSON

My Merryweather damson has set it's best crop ever but all the leaves have curled. I assumed it was the dreaded aphids that have been giving such a big problem with the apples this year. I will have to have a closer look at it. The tree still seems to be alive in spite of it's sad appearance and the fruit seems OK so far. I hope it will recover.

The apple trees are continuing to make new aphidless growth but now it is the time for the codling moth grubs to start drilling into the new apples. As the crop is abundant I've had to do a fair amount of thinning so have been able to dispose of the apples that have been spoilt.

Never a dull moment in an orchard!

Rose

LEAF CURDLING

Had a closer look at the damson today. Can't see any aphids, so I think it is the midges that Stephen mentioned. I would describe the leaves as more curdled than curled. The bugs seem to have got inside the leaves causing them to bloat in the area between the veins. A nasty sight, but the tree is fighting back and producing new unaffected leaves. Could still be OK for my favourite damson jam this year. I am glad to say that the apple trees have not been attacked by these micro beasties.

Rose.



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BEST EVER CIDER

Someone recently recommended Kingston Black and Yarlinton Mill as being the best blend ever. It would be interesting to make comparisons this year. Can anybody else offer advice concerning wondrous blends they've discovered? I have always used my KB as a single variety as I just love it as it is. Now this year I am looking forward to trying the KB YM, or should it be 2KB YM, or whatever?

Rose.

CANKER

Do not despair with the KB canker, Ray. My first KB had a really bad canker just above the rootstock that half girdled the KB scion. I thought the tree was lost, but left it alone to see what would happen. Gradually the canker became overgrown with new KB wood. Now 15 years later apart from the rather bulbous graft region, there is no evidence of this early setback. The tree crops reliably every year and there have been no further attacks of canker. It almost seems to have developed immunity, in spite of our moist climate. Normally if a variety is prone to canker it is a waste of time here in Dorset. I have long given up trying to grow Cox's!

Rose

I hate having to dig up a tree that is still alive. If canker strikes I do the same as Stephen, cut it all away and apply a wound sealant. I saved a James Grieves by cutting the whole top off so that only the good part of the trunk was left. Within a few years a new head has developed that has now started to bear a good crop. I have a Kingston Black that was once nearly ringed by canker only 2 inches above the graft. Surgery plus Arbrex cured this too and this tree is now one of my best. The old wound is now completely covered with healthy bark. The crop is very good this year. The strange thing is that both of these trees have not been troubled with canker since. It almost seems as though they have acquired some immunity to the problem. It does seem to be a shame to dig up a healthy root system that has probably taken a few years to get established. It is well worth giving the tree another chance. It has amazed me to see the renewed vigour of trees after surgery. It is as though they are saying "Thank you doctor, I will be fine now."

I do talk to them you know,

Rose.



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JULY

From Ukcider

PRESS CLOTHS

I am making a traditional oak framed 'cheese' type cider press. Can anyone give me a source for some suitable coarsely woven cloth for the 'cheeses'. I imagine there must be a hygenic version of hessian available somewhere or other.

Rose

Thank you, John, Andrew and Roy, for your advice re press cloths. I will try out the curtain material. Another item I would dearly love to find would be a 2 x 2 ft stainless steel tray to collect the juice at the base of the press. I've surfed myself silly looking at manufacturers of catering equipment etc without success. Any ideas anyone? Roy, I looked in at the Atlantic Farm shop you told me of, in Bungay. I was over in Norfolk on holiday so I called in on the way back and bought two of their large ex lemon juice plastic drums at £9 each. They will make good fermenting vessels. What a wonderful shop for cider makers. Just wish it was closer to home as they also have the huge 1500 litre juice tanks at only £70.

Rose.

SCRATTER MILL VARNISH

Far be it from me to cast any sort of slur on anybody's cider, it was just that I have been pondering whether it would be a good idea to varnish the new oak on the scrapper mill I have rebuilt. You may remember my comments at the time, as to how all the parts that had been in contact with the juice were riddled with woodworm. It would seem to be a good idea to juice proof the wood with varnish as you did with your juice tray.

My other reason for thinking about this is the matter of hygiene. Surely it can't be good for wood to be soaked in juice year on year. I know the old cider makers did it, but you only have to think of some of the evil stuff that was made on farms and made 'Scrumpy' a name that was despised. We have heard the story many times as to how the flavour 'builds up' in the cider making equipment! I am in a transition stage between ever more demijohns and using casks or plastic drums. I know that I can make good cider in glass but it is becoming too labour intensive. I have been put off using the



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whiskey barrels that I bought by Dave Matthews' lament about too many ciders being whisky flavoured. This led me to the recycled juice drums.

The scientific expose of the absorbent property of plastic has probably done many of us a favour and also advanced the cause of good clean cider. I think a lot of people are using these readily available containers. It is a common sight around the West Country to see a row of the big black drums in a cider maker's yard. Maybe they bought them new, but I somehow doubt it. There is not a lot of money in making cider, especially at wholesale prices. So I've cut my whiskey barrels in half and planted them with cannas. (My how they are blooming!) The juice drums will become water butts. I will just have to save up and buy new from Vigo or similar.

I've found a firm at Westbury, Wilts, that makes the palletised 1000 litre plastic cube tanks. They cost £130 each. Again, many thanks Andrew for the comprehensive information.

Who dares to question the value of ukcider?

Rose.



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AUGUST

From Ukcider

TRAVELS

Welcome to Hagar and all our cider friends in Oz and NZ. It is great to be able to compare notes and share our experiences with you. I've had the great pleasure of visiting both of your countries since I retired and found a friendly welcome wherever I went. I loved both countries and hope I will be able to go back again one day. Of course I was always on the lookout for orchards and remember seeing a lot of apples and plums in parts of New Zealand but not in Australia. Vineyards however, seemed to be everywhere! Is there a recognised apple growing area in Oz? I imagine that parts of NSW and Tasmania would have a good climate for it. The great heat and lack of rain must make it difficult to grow apples in other areas, as well as the native birds such as parakeets. I have Western Rosellas in my conservatory and have discovered that their favourite food is apple. I feel sure that if they were wild they could devastate an orchard. It will be interesting to hear of your joys as well as tribulations, with regard to cider making. Which varieties of apples grow well, etc. Looking forward to your postings,

Rose.

Must make haste to Waitrose, if they have Weston's Organic at such a good price. Mark is right, I love it! In fact I regard it as a benchmark cider. I've only made cider anything like as good as this from 100% Kingston Black. (Perhaps they use them as well). I have a very good crop of KB this year, so I shall see if I can achieve that remarkable flavour. Kevin mentions Lyne Down Cider. I did the Big Apple Cider cycle route in May and can report that Lyne down are still making their own, though the house and business has changed ownership. I bought a bottle of their cider, but was aghast at the price of £4. It was nice but no more than average, in my opinion.

Rose.



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SEPTEMBER

From Ukcider

WESTONS ORGANIC

I did the trip to Waitrose and found the recommended 3 ltr boxes of Westons organic. Neat packaging, but I hope it does not signal the end of their nice 2ltr jars, that I am avidly collecting! The cider is the same as the 7.3 % oak conditioned that I bought previously from the Westons shop at Much Marcle and I have been enjoying it this very evening. Regarding the ingredients, I noticed that they have omitted the list on their new packaging. On the 2ltr jars it stated that organic cider apples were used plus organic sugar , malic acid and SO2. I hope the apples were grown in Herefordshire, but would not be surprised if they came from France, as no mention is made. I've no wish to stir up the hornets nest about permitted ingredients again, but I can't see much to object to. Surely we all use SO2 and sometimes a little sugar to produce a medium dry. I imagine that the water is added to get the alcohol level to the correct value for the duty payable. It is only the malic acid that concerns me a little, but after all this is in apples anyway. I suppose they put more in to give some extra bite. No doubt Andrew can enlighten me here. Nevertheless, I do find this a most enjoyable cider.

Rose

Hello All. just back from my hols in bonnie Scotland. Beautiful scenery and unusually so was the weather, but cider and apple trees were scarce to say the least. I did find a few bottles of Westons in Safeways in Inverness and seeing that it was the ' organic ' decided to try one. There was even a label on the bottle proclaiming that it had won an organic award. This did not taste at all like the Westons organic vintage that I had previously obtained in the 2ltr jars. It was heavily carbonated, which I hate. If this was the same as Ray tried, I would agree that it is pretty awful. I've also just read Andrew's posting on the subject re the sugar and malic acid etc and now wonder if I've been conned by diluted cider wine reacidified. Shame if it was, because I liked it. May be something to do with my own use of wine yeast for cider making!

Rose

SWEET ALFORD/LE BRET

Readers of the splendid Somerset Pomona by Liz Copas may have been intrigued, as I was, by the mix up between these two varieties when they were propagated at Long Ashton. I obtained Sweet Alford from Merriot with my original trees 12 yrs ago. Ive made some pleasant cider from it over the



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last few years (100% juice, of course!) However it seems to be going biennial, as there are not many apples on it this year. Having seen the Pomona, I have been watching things carefully this year. The fruit is nearly ripe and from its appearance, yellow with red speckley stripes, it is definately Le Bret. I wondered if other people growing "Sweet Alford" had also become aware of this. I wont be complaining to Merriot nurseries as Le Bret is also a quality cider apple. It is an early cropper like my Tom Putts and Redstreaks. They are looking red and pretty in the grass under the trees already, so its time to get busy again.

Rose.

My Le Brets, like yours, Stephen, haven't dropped yet. What I meant to say was that it is an earlier variety than Sweet Alford, being ready in October instead of November. This is another aid to distinguishing between them. Le Bret is also earlier in blossom. The excellent photos in Liz's book have made me look more closely at the apples this year. My first cider tree, now 15 yrs old was Somerset Redstreak. I like the cider it makes and have propagated more trees from it. Now I've noticed that the apples, although they look like SR, have unusally long stems. SR stems are noticeably short. I am wondering what it really is. Anybody got any Ideas?

Rose.

MY NEW PRESS

I've just completed my first pressing using the rack and cloth press that I made this summer. I am pleased to say that it works very well. It produced 7 gallons of juice from 10 gallons of milled Tom Putts, which seems to be a respectable yield. It is certainly a great improvement on the 1 gallon basket press that I've used for the last 12 years. In case anybody else is making a press at the moment, here are some details that may be useful: The cheese stack in my press is 18 x 18 inches and consists of 6 layers, each 2 inches thick. The top pressure plate is made of two pieces of 3/4 inch plywood stuck together. The base plate was made the same way. The juice tray is a stainless steel Gastronorm container from www.meillerduchef.com . I fitted an ordinary stainless sink outlet to this, to act as a juice outlet. The press frame is made of oak from my local timber yard and is bolted together with stainless studding, washers and nuts. After considerable research, I found what I think is the perfect hydraulic jack. The trouble with most car jacks is that they only have a maximum extension of 5 or 6 inches. This means that you have to keep adding hardwood chocks, in order to get the full extension needed in a cider press. The jack I have obtained is a double ram telescopic type that has a full travel of 10 inches. This is ideal for my press, especially as it also has a working pressure of 12 tonnes. the jack is a Draper High Lift Bottle, Pt No. 55124. It can be obtained from



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www.tooled-up.com I took up Andrew and Roy's suggestion of using the nylon curtain material to contain the cheeses. It is very good and easy to use. I was surprised how cleanly the used apple pulp came away from this material, when pressing was completed. It was like unwrapping a dry biscuit of apple.

I am delighted. Its the Redstreaks tomorrow!

Rose

Not a scientific assessment as yet. I couldn't wait to see the thing work, so I just milled the Tom Putts until I had two 5 gallon bins full of pomace. I loaded the press with this, which as luck would have it, was just enough to fill the 6 layer stack (total height 12 inches). The ram squeezed each 2 inch layer down to about 1/2 an inch. There was still some travel left, but I did not want to push my luck too soon! 7 gallons of juice was obtained. Today however it was a different story. I pressed the same amount of Somerset redstreak, and only got 5 gallons. This was in spite of the fact that I had left these apples under the tree for several weeks to soften. Yield is obviously dependent on the type of apple. I remember last year getting some amazing yields from Bramleys. It will be interesting to see what the new press will do to them. I will do a proper calculation of yield based on weight rather than volume, now that the initial excitement is over!

Rose

PRESS RACKS

A further tip that I forgot to mention yesterday. If you have any of those wardrobe louvre doors, that were so popular in the 70s, the slats in them are perfect for making press racks. The wood that was used was close grained and of good quality, not the soft wood rubbish so widely used today.

Rose

Ray replied that the wood is called 'Ramin' and also suggests 'Obeche' and Spruce providing it isn't too sappy

You certainly know your woods, Ray. It is surprising what a lot of wood is needed to make the racks. I did not have enough louvre doors, so had to buy some ready made racks from Vigo. Theirs are made



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of Acacia wood. This seems rather exotic, as was the price, at £30 each! I am pleased that I did not buy their press cloths at £15 each. The net curtains do a splendid job. It only cost me £9 for enough material to make the 6 cloths.

Rose

PRESSING RESULTS

A measured result from my new press. Here are the figures from a single pressing of Kingston Black:

Tree..... Kingston Black, on M25 , planted as 2 yr maiden in 1993. This was the one nearly killed by canker.

Soil.....Low grade. Shallow loam over chalk. No fertiliser or sprays

Crop 2004.....66 lbs.

Milled volume.....9 gallons of pomace

Press yield.....40 lbs (just over 4 gallons of juice)

Actual yield..... 60%.

Initial SG 1050

This cider will be keeved and fermented as a single variety. The pomace was allowed to stand for 24 hrs before pressing. Hoping this will make Rose's favourite tippie for Summer 2005!

Questions:

- After milling you said that you let the pomace stand for 24 hours. Do you always do this or vary dependent upon apple variety, etc.?
- Do you add any sulphite (i.e. Campden Tablets) and if so when?
- After milling or after pressing?
- Do you go with nature's own yeasts or add a specific yeast at a desirable moment?

I only let the pomace stand for a day, when I am making my own favourite single varieties of KB, Dabinet an Stoke Red. This is because if I am going to drink it, I prefer a keeved cider that still has a little of its natural sweetness left. All other cider that I make is a continuous process, from mill to press. As for sulphite. I would never risk cider without it, having had vinegary disasters in the past! I put one campden tablet in for every gallon from the press. At this stage I also add white wine yeast to get things off to a good start. This year though for the first time, I've let my speciality ciders start themselves, just to see if it makes any difference to the taste.

Rose



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Q: .. off the top of your head ... roughly how much do you produce (annually)?

70 gallons last year. That was using the 1 gallon basket press. I am hoping to do much more this year with the new press that is giving 6 or 7 gallons each time. I am up to 30 galls and have only just started. Once I have finished my own orchard it will really depend on how many real cider apples I can obtain elsewhere. I've already started turning down people who kindly offer their cooking apples. I did too many Bramleys last year and the blend was too acidic for my taste.

Rose

BUSHEL

John your measurement units go back further into folklore than even the ones that I still use, (in spite of the pressure towards metrication here). The hundredweight (cwt) is 112 pounds. I had to look up the bushel. It is actually a volumetric unit and I probably learnt at school that ; 2 gallons is one peck and 4 pecks is one bushel. So the bushel is 8 gallons. Now I can visualise what the bushel sacks of apples used to look like, that are mentioned in the old wassail songs. As it happens, I managed to get 1 cwt of pomace on to my press this evening. So far it has produced 7 gallons of juice. If it manages to squeeze another gallon overnight. I will have a bushel of juice. The apple today is Royal Somerset, more juicy than Kingston. It looks as though the yield will be better.

Rose

I've only just begun! There will be Dabinet, Yarlington Mill and Harry Masters Jersey from my own orchard and assorted varieties from the orchards and gardens around here. Last weekend I picked 3 cwt of cider apples from three old trees in a garden. Half of these were the distinctive bell shaped apple that is sometimes called Sheep's Nose. Having delved into Liz's Pomona, I think the other trees were Royal Somerset and Court de Wyck. Next week I am off to see a friend who has 6 cider trees, one of which is the beloved Kingston Black. Her late husband was a keen cider man and she is pleased that I can make use of the apples. Lucky me! The apples are building up in the barn, so I will be very busy from now on. I expect ukcider will go a bit quiet for the next month or so as a lot of us will be so busy making the glorious liquid.

Cheers, Rose



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ROYAL SOMERSET

It is new to me Ray. I came across it a week ago in a garden near Yetminster. I always make a Demijohn or two of every variety that I come across and put the rest into the blend. That way I will know whether it is worth doing as a single. Be able to let you know next Spring. It is one of the most exciting things about making cider. I see it as being every bit as interesting as wine. Kingston is my Shiraz, Dabinett my Cabernet, etc.

Rose.



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OCTOBER

From Ukcider

CATCHING UP AGAIN

What a lot of interesting post there has been while I have been so busy apple washing! Thank you all for your views about apple cleanliness and additives. I feel more encouraged to stay with what I am doing, although it is quite a chore. Over a ton of apples have passed through my sinks already. (Not a small quantity in my view , Wayne). That is the old type 20 cwt ton with 112 lbs to the cwt. Next week I'm back to Justin's at Sparkford for another half ton. I need more jersey types to enrich the blend. Justin tells me that following my input on ukcider, the Norfolk cider group came and collected 2 tons of mixed cider apples. I do hope they keep us posted as to how they get on. It sounds like a good venture they have got going there, which would be of great interest to us all. The post here has been ukcider at its best, since I last logged on. Apple washing is obviously quite a fun thing. I loved hearing about Roy's innovative bed spring technique! How interesting to hear about cider history in the USA from John and about Dick's recent holiday here. Thanks for the valuable tasting notes, Dick. Can't wait to check some of these out, myself. Picking up on Stephen's idea of tasting our own ciders. A great idea. I wanted to take up the kind invitation to your orchard event last May, Stephen, but it clashed with my trip to Putley for Big Apple. I was sorry about this at the time, as it would have been nice to meet you and to see your orchard.

We have a blossom event here in May with a barbecue and a cider tasting. Last year we also restored the village May Queen ceremony. The local Morris men came and after they had done their dance routine, they persuaded the rest of us to dance as well. one of them was also a country dance caller. Everyone must have enjoyed themselves because I did not have much cider left over. Morris men have a prodigious thirst for cider! Next year we are hoping to add to the event by getting the children to dance the Maypole. I will post the details here, nearer the time. If any group members would like to come, with or without their own cider, for tasting alongside my own, they will be most welcome.

Rose.

I'm not trying to wind anybody up, Wayne. I've been making cider almost continually since mid September and all of those apples have been through my two sinks. Tomorrow I'm getting a load more that will have been mechanically harvested from the orchard floor. I will certainly make sure that they get a good washing. The value of this came home to me the other day. I was kneeling under a tree picking up apples when I realised from the unpleasant odour that I had knelt in some badger pooh! Wouldn't fancy that flavour in the cider.



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APPLE WASHING

Surely it is common sense to wash the apples as thoroughly as possible, especially if some, or all, of them have been collected from the ground. Even if they have not been sprayed, all manner of beasties have probably crawled over or shat upon them. I have a double sink which I use to carry out a two stage wash. They go in the first basin to remove any mud or worse. Then I pull them over into the second basin. Here they are washed again in water that has had a teaspoon of SO₂ added. At this stage I also cut out any rotten parts from the apples, before they go into the mill. I believe that cleanliness makes good cider and that sulphiting is essential. In fact I am now using more campden tablets for the higher pH juices, following the useful discussion here with Andrew recently. I've also started using Vigo's sulphur candles for sterilising my barrels. They are effective and easy to use. I do'nt think you can be too careful. There seems to be an awful lot of fruit flies still around in my cider barn this year as the weather is still warm enough for them. Just do'nt trust these little beggars! In spite of all my precautions I have never had any trouble with starting fermentation, with or without added yeast. It just happens, after a day or two. Like magic!

Rose

POWER STEERING

Loved your pictures. Ray! Congratulations on the beautifully grown apples. They should make some very tasty cider. Those Yarlingtons against the clear blue sky look good enough to eat. Dare I ask if they were sprayed?!! I laughed about Gail 'furiously milling'. I have been very furious with that machine lots of times. Sometimes it is impossible to turn the wheel using the handle and I have to inch the thing round, rather like a steering wheel without any power steering.

Rose.

APPLE AND CIDER WEEKEND

Just noticed in my local paper that Sanders Gardenworld at Burnham -on-Sea, Somerset, is having an apple & cider special event this weekend, 16/17 October. It is located just off M5 J22. Details as follows: - 300 varieties of apples on display- -fruit trees & bushes for sale- -Advice on planting & pruning- -ciders to taste & for sale- -fun & games for the children- - rural crafts & local produce- - Bring your own apples and press them free of charge on their press- Personally, I have got more than enough of that to do here, but I might drive over there if it is a nice day.

Rose.



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Sorry if I gave anybody a wasted journey. I did wonder if, being a garden centre, it was a bit of a ruse to sell their expensive little Cox and Bramley trees. However being right in the middle of Cider country I expected better things. Had to smile when I learnt of the fate of one of their 12 ltr Vigo presses. Exactly the same happened to mine, not long after I bought it. This prompted me to get a 2ton car jack (£8 from Screwfix). It fitted between the beam and the wooden pressure plate and had just about the right extension. This was a much better arrangement than the screw and gave a better juice yield. Although I am now using my rack and cloth press for the cider, I still find the 12 ltr press useful for small quantities of apples that are new to me, which I want to try as a single variety. I've also been using it for wine making as it allows the different grape varieties to be made separately. I also think the scrapper that goes with it is too coarse. Vigo have the answer now with their stainless steel shredder, but you have to have £600 to spare!

Rose

SOMERSET CIDER APPLES

I have just collected half a ton of mixed variety cider apples from a farm about 1 mile South of Sparkford (near A303). They are from an old orchard of standard trees, are of good quality and have never been sprayed. The trees were planted by a previous owner so the present farmer is unsure of their varieties. The apples were a mix of 4 types, two of which look like Sweet Alford and Harry Masters Jersey. I am still working on the others (with Liz).

If anybody would like to go and collect some, they are £80 per ton.

Contact Justin Crawford on 07721 374761 at Rectory Farm, Weston Banfelde. I'm going to be ever so busy next week, after a short break this week end to go to Big Apple celebrations at Much Marcle. Guess what I will be bringing back from Westons!

Rose

APPLE PICTURES

Trevor asked if I could put my apple pictures on the site. I would like to Trevor, but they would need a lot of editing as I took many shots from different angles etc. I almost have enough to compile my own Herefordshire pomona! It would all take more time than I can spare just now. Also I still only have steam internet. The half ton of apples from Somerset are still in need of pressing and yesterday I picked 2 bushels of grapes, (showing off John, now I know what a bushel is). On a more positive note, the helpful expert from the cider museum said that they were making a CD rom of



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Herefordshire cider apples, that will be available next year. That will be useful. My posting on Big apple reads like an advert for Vigo, so I must redress the balance by mentioning other highlights. The orchard and farm walk was most enjoyable. To see this year's fabulous crop of apples in the old standard orchards was a memorable sight. There were some ancient perry pear trees as well. I had not realised how large these trees can become. They looked as impressive as old oak trees. There were apple books on sale in the main display barn and I bought a new one by Fiona Mac called Cider in the Three Counties. I've only read a little so far but I can see that this is a well researched work that gives a comprehensive account of cider making and related topics in that area. It is a good read as the historical detail is punctuated by hilarious anecdotes. It is also good to see many of our ukcider friends mentioned, like Andrew Lea and Dave Matthews. It is a must have! details are: Logaston Press [ISBN 1-904396-10-0](https://www.logastonpress.com/ISBN-1-904396-10-0) , Price £9.95.

Cheers, Rose

BIG APPLE AT MARCLE

Just back from a really enjoyable weekend. The whole event was very well organised and both days were needed to do justice to all that was on offer. Rather than bore you all with every itsy bit of it, I will just mention what were the highlights from the cidermaking viewpoint. Hereford cider Museum put on a super display of cider apples with each variety named. I brought samples of the ones I bought in Somerset last week and was able to confirm them as Harry Masters, Sweet alford, Brown Snout and Cider lady's Finger. I also took plenty of photos of the apples on display for future reference. I enjoyed watching the cider making at Lyne Down and at Greg's Pitt. It was useful to see some of Vigo's expensive pieces of kit being used. The stainless steel 'garden shredder type' mill was being used at Greg's to mill Kingston Black. I was impressed with the fine quality of the pomace produced. It looked like a pink porridge. The machine easily accepts whole apples and is very quick in operation. Must have one.....one day! They also had some of the Vigo stainless steel variable capacity tanks there. An excellent idea for combating air spoilage of the cider, but also alas rather expensive. Vigo pumps were also in use at both places for transferring juice from the bucket below the press to the vats. Another useful thing to have, but I was told that it is essential to coarse filter the juice coming out of the press or these pumps can easily clog up. And of course I made the essential pilgrimage to Westons to collect a 6 jar pack of my favourite. Cheers to their 'Vintage',

Rose.

Ps. Thanks for the pH papers info, Andrew. You are a Star! I will order some tomorrow.



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PH TEST PAPERS

Got the test papers from Homebrew that Andrew recommended. They are an easy and inexpensive solution, but I find them rather difficult to interpret. Firstly I tried one with bramley juice that I am fermenting separately. This produced a yellowish green on the test strip, indicating about pH 3. So far so good, exactly as expected. I then tested my 'all in' blend. This time the indicator portion turned a slate grey colour which bears no resemblance to any of the reference colours. I suppose that I must assume that it is a mixture of the yellow and purple extremes of the test strip and therefore indicates that my blend has a medium pH value.

Rose

NEPETA

The RHS magazine 'The Garden' is a real gem this month, being devoted almost entirely to fruit growing. There is a tip in one of the articles that could be useful. Apparently if Nepeta (Catmint) is grown below fruit trees it will help in the control of aphids. It flowers about the same time as the annual aphid onslaught. Its flowers encourage a certain type of parasitic wasp that lays its eggs in aphids. After the awful mess these little perishers made of my trees this year, I'm definitely going to give this a try. Probably end up with all the cats in the neighbourhood lolling around as well!

Rose



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NOVEMBER

From Ukcider

Recent postings about perry fermenting, or not, has me wondering if other cider makers have discovered how easily apple juice ferments in plastic spring water bottles.

At this time of year I like to taste the juice of each type of apple that I press. It is interesting to taste the flavour before fermentation and compare this with the sort of cider that each variety produces. (Thanks to Andrew's little test strips, I also check the pH at this stage, so that I know how much SO₂ is needed.)

I've been putting these juice samples in the little blue plastic bottles that are used for spring water. Then I put them in the fridge so that I can enjoy Kingston Black, or whatever with my breakfast. Often they get forgotten and after a day or two start to ferment even at the low temperature and with no added yeast. It seems to be guaranteed. Probably these would make perfect starter bottles to get a large quantity going, if I needed this assistance. However what I have found is that these little bottles of partly fermented cider make a delightful drink. A sort of cidre nouveau! It's about 5% abv and still pleasantly sweet after about 2 weeks.

Already I hear people tut tutting about the danger of explosion. In fact it is amazing how tough these bottles are. The corrugations in the sides of the bottle allow for expansion. Not wanting to have one burst in the fridge, I experimented by leaving one in the garden last year. It was there until Spring and still refused to burst.

Of course I am not advocating that anybody else does this! Just thought you would be interested, or may even have discovered it already.

Rose

I am valiantly battling to get all my apples milled before they go bad! Nearly caught up this evening, which is just as well as I'm getting a final load of Porter's Perfection next week. I have not heard anything about Powerstock's festival and hope that details become posted here in due course. I would like to go to it.



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SHEEPS NOSE

Wayne asked about Sheep's Nose cider apples. The apples I used a few weeks ago were the type called Bell. They are a mid-season sweet that are often also called Sweet Sheeps Nose. If you hold one of these with the eye uppermost it is obvious how they got their name. The conical shape has an inward curvature that makes it 'bell out' towards the stem. Of course if you turn the apple sideways, it then looks very much like a sheep's nose.

Yesterday I saw another type of Sheeps Nose in Justin's orchard. This was the late season sharp variety. They were still hard and green and firmly attached to the tree. Liz Copas describes this in her Somerset Pomona as the one that is sometimes called Sheeps Nose No. 3. Don't ask what happened to No. 2! I also had the pleasure of seeing Porter's Perfection for the first time. The characteristic tendency to produce double apples makes it easy to identify. They are also a late and need a few more weeks on the tree. I am looking forward to trying some as a single variety.

Justin's orchard is sheer delight. 100 year old Standards in a rich green sward. Whoever planted it must have been a real cider enthusiast. It seemed to me that every tree was a different variety. Unfortunately the planting record has been lost. There must be every type of bittersweet jersey that is in Liz's book, possibly more. I suggested that he asks Liz to come and identify them. It was more than I could do once I'd got past Dabinet Yarlinton and Kingston Red.

Justin is keen to preserve his orchard and it is well looked after. New trees have been added whenever the ancients have fallen. He likes the idea of craft cidermakers using his apples in the traditional way, as opposed to just sending them off to the Mill to be crunched up to make the nominal English apple component of whatever it is they are making. He is also warm to the idea of having a blossom event for cider enthusiasts. It would be the perfect venue. If anyone needs more apples, please support him. Julian Temperley is going to have some shortly, so speed may be of the essence. I packed my Landrover with 3/4 ton of lovely jerseys. Had to drive back slowly because I could hardly see out. This may keep me quiet for a while!

Rose.

Ps 1...Worth Matravers is between Swanage and Corfe in Dorset. Ps 2...What date is Clytha next May? I am flexible.



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DECEMBER

From Ukcider

DEFRA

Just received the November update bulletin from Defra about the proposed single payment scheme. It looks as though they have relented considerably with regard to the eligibility of orchards. They have proposed to the EU that an orchard should qualify if the foliage/bud height is above 1.5 m. Minimum size of the orchard allowable is 0.3 ha unless part of a larger holding. This will be the salvation of nearly all of the traditional orchards, providing it is approved, though bush orchards still wont benefit. It still does not make sense that apples can be excluded at all as being an agricultural product, but at least it looks as though the campaign may yet bear some fruit.

Rose