APPLES
Malus domesticus (domestic apple) .

"Old apple tree, old apple tree, we've come to wassail thee, to bear and to bow apples enow."

"If wold Christmas day be fair and bright, ye's have apples to your hearts delight."
Medieval Flowers, Innes & Perry

As the anachronist cruises through artificially lit supermarket isles, eyeing with despondency the sad 2 or 3 varieties of apples commonly available, her spirit could perhaps be renewed by reflection on times past when apples were so numerous in variety, and so magically charged, that one would never grow tired of the fruits.

Apples were first introduced across Europe and into the British Isles by the Romans, and at the time of their arrival in Britain, Roman records indicate that they had over 250 varieties under cultivation. Flavours are described, irresistably, as suffused with the aromas of pineapple, pear, quince, nutmeg, hazelnut, wine, rose, and even carnation. The flesh was distinctly crisp, tender, fine or coarse grained, white, cream, lemon or golden in colour, with some varieties coloured rich wine red to the very core! The shape of the fruits varied enormously, and the fruits could be conical, round, flattened, heart-shaped or oblong, with skin colour which included emerald green, pure gold, golden yellow, solid red, striped, splashed, rouged or russeted.

In medieval society, apples were a valuable and precious food source, a fruit which bore well in a cooler climate, and which stored reliably over the lean winter months. One of the apple varieties introduced by the Romans, and directly traceable back to their arrival in Britain, is Court Pendu Plat. This most ancient of apple trees, is amazingly, still available and last winter, I planted one at Wildwood. The tree is much smaller in size than a modern apple variety, and the diminutive fruit it bears has yellow skin, flushed orange and red, sometimes with a splash of russet. The flesh is described as having a creamy, brisk acid flavour. As my tree is only very new, I have yet to enjoy the visual splendour and flavour of this ancient fruit.

Given that the apple was such a vital food source, a number of rituals evolved around the tree to ensure protection from harm or evil spirits, and encourage a good yield. In the Kent, and in the West Country of England, apples were a vital part of the economy, as the making of cider for public houses brought significant income to local peoples, and especially to monasteries, where cider was a major source of income. Many rural communities developed rituals for ensuring the safety of their precious orchards and "Saluting the Apple Tree" was a time honoured tradition until quite recent times in the West Country. Cakes were placed upon the branches of a selected apple tree, and a generous amount of

cider poured onto the roots, while reciting

"*Here's to thee, old apple tree, Whence thou mayest bud and whence thou mayest blow, And whence thou mayest bear apples enow! Bushel by bushel sacks full, And my pockets full too! Hurrah-ya!*

The medieval activity of Wassailing was intended to make dormant apple trees fruitful, drive away malevolent spirits and awaken the urge for growth and health from within the dormant tree. Fires were lit, the trees beaten with sticks and cows horns blown at full volume. There was much dancing around the trees, and drinking of quanitities of apple cider on the eve of Christmas and Epiphany, the old 12th Night on January 17th. It serves us well in the southern hemisphere to bear in mind that these old festivals took place in the northern hemisphere in the dead of winter. Like so many festivals which modern societies assume are connected to the calender date, they are actually associated with the reality of the seasons, and it is the time of year, not the calender, which determines such activities. It would be unwise to undertake such wild behaviour, apart perhaps from drinking cider, while the tree was active and fruiting.

After harvesting, it was customary to leave one apple behind on each tree, as a gift for the guardian spirit of the tree. To fail to acknowledge this spirit would likely prevent a good crop the following year.

During the medieval period, apples had a reputation not only as a valuable food source, but as a medicinal cure-all. The fruit was used to aid digestion and treat constipation. A decotion of the bark of apple trees was used to treat fevers, and rotten apples used as a soothing poultice to treat sore eyes. John Gerard, writing in 1633 declared than "pomatum" was a popular and commercially available facial treatment, softening and whitening the skin, and fading freckles. It was produced by combining rose-water, apple pulp and swine's grease.

Cooked fruits were generally preferred to eating raw, as medieval society held a prevailing view that eating raw fruit was potentially dangerous. Apples were extremely popular in cooked dishes, including sauces, pies and preserves, and of course, cider making was a major industry by the 14th Century. As early as the 9th Century cider production was documented by Charlemagne, and cider was a drink very much favoured by the Normans, who brought their predilection with them into England after the Norman conquest.

Kent was for a time the centre of medieval cider making, and famed for it's strong spicey brew. But by the 16th Centruy, cider had fallen from favour, and it's popularity was only revived after better cider strains of fruit were developed in France.

Some old cider varetiesof apple still vailable are "Stack Me Girdle", Foxwhelp", "Royal Widdling", and "Kill-Boys", worth growing for the names alone!

Many old apples are still available from specialist heritage fruit collections, and the Barony of Ynys Fawr is fortunate indeed to have a world renoun heritage apple collection right on it's door-step, at Woodbridge, south of Hobart. Woodbridge Fruit Trees have preserved a dazzling array of ancient fruits, and specialise in apples, which are available for sale bare-rooted during the winter months. Catalogues are available via internet.

Apples are in fact, related to roses, and favour very similar conditions. The planting hole needs to be prepared well in advance, and it would not be unwise to start work in mid-summer, for the mid-winter planting. Select an open, sunny site, protected if possible from the strongest winds, and which is likely to receive a reasonable amount of water, that is to say, don't shove it somewhere behind the shed, knowing full well you are likely to forget it there! Dig a hole around a metre wide, and up to 500ml deep, removing any stone, or roots from surrounding trees. Add plenty of organic matter, animals manures, grass-clipping, old straw or hay, mix togther, and soak thoroughly. This mix can now be left until the winter planting, and over the autumn months, the hole will fill with worms and other goodies, thriving in the composted organic material. The tree, once purchased, can then be settled in and staked, ready for new spring growth. At Wildwood, we are extremely water conscious, and are accutely aware that we are unlikely to ever receive the rainfall so common in medieval Britain. Whenever a new tree is planted, we like to bury half a metre of ag-flow pipe into the hole, with the opening protruding just above ground. When the tree needs a drink, we can insert the garden hose into the opening, and allow water to drizzle down gently into the ag-flow pipe, well below the surface. This simple trick will ensure that irrigation water reaches right to the roots of the tree in even the driest summer, and encourages root development at a deeper level, giving the best possible drought protection for your tree. A heavy layer of mulch at ground level will seal off evaporation. Don't allow mulch to rest against the trunk, as collar rot can result from wet organic material crowding the bark.

Apples are very interesting to possums, and the fruit once ripe will be attractive to birds, so bird-netting might be helpful if you are gardeing in a rural area. Codling moth can also be an pest, but a simple remedy for this is to smear Vaseline around the trunk of the tree in a band. Codling moth lava crawl up the trunk, but cannot get past the Vaseline, and so will try your neighbour's tree instead. Pear slugs can, occassionally make a nuisance of themselves, but these are easily disposed of - just fill a watering can with soapy water, and give the tree a sudsy shower. Dishwashing liquid or other mild soap is fine. It clogs the pear slugs breathing aparatus, and removes them swiftly, without coating your lovely fruit in toxins.

Springtime apple blossom is very beautiful, and in some varieties, sweetly scented, and will add lovely spring freshness to your garden. In very young trees, it is advisable not to allow fruit set, as forming fruits will take a large

amount of the tree's energy, better spent on solid root development and branch structure in the first 12 to 24 months. Fruits mature between high summer and autumn, depending on variety, and anyone who has eaten an apple straight from the tree, especially one which is organically grown, wiil know they taste very different to store bought fruit.

Apples are a small, pretty tree, suitable for even the tinest garden, and some varieties are even petite enough to thrive in a large pot. Court Pendu Plat, the old Roman, is one of these. With a little care and careful planning, apples offer delicate blossom, delicious healthy fruit, and historical interest together in one lovely tree.

Ref: Woodbridge Fruit Trees woodbridgefruittrees@gmail.com
In a Unicorn's Garden, Judith McLeod, *Medieval Flowers,* Innes & Perry

Footnote

For those readers who enjoyed the November article on roses, I would like to add a note regarding a thrilling discovery. In December, whilst driving through a country lane in the Huon Valley, I came upon a stunning rose bush growing in a tiny and immaculate garden cared for by a mature lady. It was Rosamundi, Gallica versicolour, a rose I had been seeking for the last 25 years. Gallica versicolour is an ancient rose first documented in the 12th century. It's parent, the Apothecary's rose, was introduced to Europe by the crusaders, and there is significanct evidence to suggest that Eleanor of Aquitane may have brought the rose back herself, from her pilgrimage with Louis VII to the Holy Land in the late 1140's. The Apothecary's rose was described in detail in the November Islander, and is very lovely in itself. However, roses have a curious habit - sometimes they "sport". A "sport' is a new shoot, sent up by a mature rose bush, which although very similar to the original parent, has some slight mutation. This was the chief avenue for development of new strains prior to the manipulation of genes through hybridisation. In the case of the Apothecary's Rose, it occassionally sends up a sport which although identical to the parent rose in almost every way, varies dramatically in colour. The parent rose is hot red/pink, the sport is hot red/pink splashed with mid-pink, pale-pink and white in a dramatic and stunning array of splodges and stripes, reminicent of raspberries and cream. It was the first of the striped roses to be documented, and was a delightful shock to plant connoissueurs of the 12th century. For the final touch of utter perfection, the scent is deep, rich and heavenly.

Legend surrounds this glorious and ancient plant. One famous tale is of how the rose got it's name.

The painted and lovely blooms of Gallica versicolour were very much beloved by Rosamund de Clifford, favoured mistress of Henry II of England 1154 - 1189. When Rosamund died in 1176, Henry was said to be so distraught at the death of his beloved that he caused her grave to be smothered in the petals of her

favourite bloom, Gallica versicolour. Thus over time, the rose which Rosamund had once held so dear, eventually assumed her name as it's own. The rose is widely known today as Rosamundi, rose of the world.

The plant I found in December was smothered in 100's of blooms from it's crown right down to ground level, some sprawling onto the lawn. Most flowers were dramatically painted, but some remained plain red/pink, showing the link to the parent rose. It was my priviledge indeed to receive a number of pieces of propagating material from the owner, who was rather stunned to discover the rose she had loved for many years was in fact almost 1000 years old, and one of the most famous roses in all history. Not as stunned as I was however. After a quarter of a century searching, Rosamundi is finally mine!

My heartfelt thanks to the owner of the pretty garden where I discovered this rose, for her warmth and generosity.

Ref: *Eleanor of Aquitane*, Alison Weir; *Classic Roses*, Peter Beales; *Roses*, Phillips & Rix