

The Efford Apple Sock Project

The Efford Apple Sock project is about designing and making a useful, functional and attractive harvesting accessory, which can be used in the harvesting of tall fruit trees in cities, towns and villages across the UK. It is also about drawing attention to the Abundance urban fruit harvesting project, its potential, its playfulness and its contribution to a more sustainable and community focused way of life.

BACKGROUND

Abundance is a project where a community harvests waste or unwanted fruit growing on trees in the neighbourhood and redistributes this for free or turns it into preserves or juice.

Abundance was started in Sheffield in 2007 by Anne-Marie Culhane & Stephen Watts – an artist/community activist and an urban forager and a team of fantastic volunteers. Abundance three years later has spawned a national network of projects, A Handbook (free to download from the internet) an Observer Ethical Award and many tonnes of local fruit put to use in the community (see www.growsheffield.com and follow the links to Abundance)

Abundance is primarily about waste, food miles, and the delights of fresh fruit, community, shared activity, creativity and fun! It is about the potential of seeing all our cities as orchards. It draws us into active relationship with the rhythm of the seasons. Once I had experienced the joy of the harvest, I become addicted to spotting the first blossom, the new leaves, the small hard fruits forming, the slow swelling, and finally back round to the right moment (there is only one!) to pick and eat.

Being part of this cycle means that I consider the length of time these trees have been here bearing fruit, how many years from grafting a scion to a rootstock till the first fruit and how much these fruit trees must be planted now if we are serious about trying to sustain ourselves more from local fruit in the years to come. Fruit trees often crop biennially; they can have good or bad years and can miss altogether with a late frost. I have become aware of unpredictability and variations in nature's patterns and got use to working with a plum year or a bumper apple one.

Efford in Plymouth has its own local food project called Grow Efford which include harvesting unused fruit trees, planting fruit trees and making juice, jams and chutneys in the community.

HARVESTING TOOLS

An exciting offshoot of Abundance is the way that different groups have innovated various picking devices for harvesting fruit. These include recycling bottles, cans, bamboo sticks, tent pegs and old drainpipes. My most recent obsession is with how to harvest fruit from large, craggy, overgrown trees. Many of our cities fruit trees are very tall as they have not been tended or pruned for many years or may have grown wild from a discarded pip. These can provide challenges for even the best climbers. Very often the rosiest, fattest, healthiest fruits are on the top outside branches!

A 5m telescopic picking stick helps resolve this problem but its slow work. It's a conscious decision about time/value/attention, Plucking the fruits one by one can take several hours, rather than shaking the tree, which can be over in a few moments. The

pay off is huge: perfect, undamaged fruit that stores and keeps well, fruit that otherwise would be out of reach, the satisfaction of doing a job well!

The pole comes with a small bag suspended from a ring of metal teeth, which are used to pluck the fruit from its branch. The bag can easily be filled by two or three big cooking apples and has to be brought to the ground and then hoisted again. Although the stick is a light weight aluminium pole it is still heavy to handle and tiring to use which limits the number of fruits that can be picked using this method.

DETAILED BRIEF FOR THE APPLE SOCK

The brief for the Efford Apple Sock is to create a knitted, stitched, embroidered or crocheted Apple Sock up to 5m long, which would be attached to the telescopic apple picker. The sock would enable the plucked fruit to fall, with gravity, through a knitted or embroidered tube and be collected at the ground – it would be an open channel all the way through. The fabric may need to be an artificial fibre with some durability as it might get damp occasionally and there is some potential for snagging that needs to be considered. It would offer some support to the apple as it fell through so it needs to be flexible with some give/elasticity. In a way its like an apple intestine! It could be a beautiful, artful object.

It would feel particularly apt if the Socks could be made from reclaimed or recycled materials. Possible materials could be ripstock cotton, netting, plastic bag strips etc. or a combination of different materials.

Particulars. The sock needs to be around 5m long and the circumference at the top is 44cms – this can get narrower as the sock goes along..but needs to remain wide enough for a BIG cooking apple (so this will depend on the stretch of your material) The system for attaching the sock/bag is through a series of eyelets in a metal hoop with teeth. There are 13 holes each .5cm in circumference

The apple socks will be tested in the field during the harvest in 2011 (Sept onwards) so we would like the socks to be completed by end of July.

Designs will be displayed on a website/blog as well as promoted through the Abundance national network and exhibited at a venue in Plymouth (tbc). This project is a collaboration between Grow Efford (funded by Plymouth Arts Centre and the Arts Council) & Plymouth City Museum in connection with Craftspace's Taking Time: Craft and the Slow Revolution exhibition.

Grow Efford and the Apple Sock project are co-ordinated by Anne-Marie Culhane. Anne-Marie is an artist, performer and community activist. Her work has two intertwined strands: engaging directly with and in communities finding and co-authoring creative responses to specific places and to the ecological challenges we face and more reflective work exploring personal, intimate relationships with landscape and ecology. This includes creative activism, performance in the landscape, curating projects and mentoring other artists. For more information see:

<http://www.amculhane.co.uk>

<http://www.growsheffield.com/pages/groShefAbund.html>

<http://www.affordtakeapart.org.uk>