

Eat More Fruit and Vegetables

Introduction

The Kitchen Garden at Grappenhall Heys represents a common feature of large houses and estates from the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth. The vegetable garden of such houses would have been surrounded by a high brick wall which hid the vegetables from view, but more importantly the walls provided shelter and warmth.

These walled kitchen gardens were expected to supply the wealthy owner with a continuous and varied supply of fresh fruit, vegetables and flowers every day of the year. Without the aid of modern day appliances, the gardeners had to provide such things as strawberries in winter and salads all the year round in sufficient quantity to cope with any number of unexpected house visitors.

Although we no longer have a house to serve, we have planted the garden with a range of fruit and vegetables that would have been familiar to the Parr family. Also, we may not grow crops in the same quantity, but we do try to extend the supply throughout the year. This is called **succession**.

Fruit

Where we are at a disadvantage is our lack of glasshouses. These would have been used to grow tender fruit such as grapes, peaches, apricots and possibly even pineapples, and to “bring on” early salad crops, as they would have protection from frost. The glasshouses were nearly always placed along the south-facing wall of the gardens (as at Grappenhall Heys), in order to take advantage of the full sun, although shading may have been required in the summer.

What we do have is a variety of **top** or tree fruit – apples, pears, plums, damson and cherry, and **soft** fruit – blackcurrants, gooseberries, raspberries, strawberries etc.

The **apple trees** are positioned in their own orchard on the eastern side of the kitchen garden, and along the south and north-facing borders. They represent varieties of **culinary** (“cooking”) and **dessert** (“eating”) apples, and have been selected to provide a crop over a prolonged period of time, from September to November.

These would have been picked and stored in a cool, dry, dark shed, to extend the supply over several months.

Varieties of apples in the gardens:

Bramley’s Seedling – culinary
Forge – dessert/culinary
Newton Wonder – culinary
Ribston Pippin – dessert
Worcester Pearmain – dessert
Adams’ Pearmain – dessert

apples cont.

Egremont Russet – dessert
Cox's Orange Pippin – dessert
Arthur Turner – culinary
Deacon's Millenium – dessert
Duke of Devonshire – dessert
Blenheim Orange – culinary/dessert
Orleans Reinette – dessert
Court Pendu Plat – dessert
Margil- dessert

The **pear trees** are trained along the east-facing wall in a style known as **espalier**. Fruit trees were often trained in this way, as it was aesthetically pleasing, it made use of an otherwise bare wall and it was an efficient way of producing a good crop in a relatively small space.

You will notice that in the espalier style the branches are trained horizontally along wires. Another style is the **cordon**, which involves growing a single trunk at a 45 degree angle to the wall, and keeping the fruiting branches (**spurs**) close to the trunk.

A Morello cherry tree has also been planted at the southern end of this wall, and this is being **fan-trained**.

The pears usually crop a little earlier than the apples, during August to September, and can generally be used for both cooking and eating.

Varieties of pears growing in the gardens:

William's Bon Chretien
Louise Bonne of Jersey
Marguerite Marillat
Conference
Jargonelle
Packham's Triumph
Vicar of Winkfield
Pitmaston Duchess
Buerre Hardy
Doyenne du Commice

The remainder of the north-facing border is made up of plum and damson trees. We also have an example each of quince, mulberry and medlar.

At present the **soft fruit**, as it is known, is grown together in one large bed. This probably would not have been the case in the Parr's day. The gooseberries, blackcurrants and red/white currents could be grown in the cooler, shadier areas of the garden, while the **cane fruit** (raspberries, blackberries and so on) were trained on wires in a similar way to cordons, and would have been placed in order to take full advantage of the ripening sun.

We are growing different varieties of gooseberry, blackcurrant, red currant, white current, raspberry, blackberry and loganberry. Unfortunately, the birds like them too!

Vegetables

To make their **cultivation** easier vegetables are traditionally grouped into 'families.' So we have peas and beans together in the **legumes**, cabbage, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, broccoli, kale, etc. are classed as **brassic**as and carrots, parsnips, beetroot, radish, swedes, turnips and sometimes onions classed as **roots**. Onions are usually treated as their own family, to include leeks, garlic and shallots.

To the above you can add **potatoes** and **salad crops** such as lettuce and cucumber.

Gardeners of old would have had many ingenious ways of encouraging crops to grow early in the year, and of storing (of course, we now have freezers!). One way of growing, say, early carrots, potatoes or lettuce would have been to use a **hotbed**. This was constructed using a pile of fresh manure topped with straw and soil. Seeds or plants were planted in this and a frame of glass (**cold frame**) placed over the top. The heat from the rotting manure would rise, encouraging the plants to grow and keeping the frost off.

We still use modern versions of cold frames today, but not so often the hotbed. Victorian kitchen gardens also used smaller versions of a cold frame, known as **lantern** and **bell cloches** to cover individual plants. Unfortunately, we have no examples of these at Grappenhall Heys at today. Another item you may see in a kitchen garden is the **forcing jar**. This was used to cover certain vegetables such as chicory and seakale, as well as rhubarb, to block out light. This 'forced' the plant upwards, looking for light, and the resulting pale shoots are said to be tastier than they would be normally.

Rotation

As mentioned above, similar vegetables are grouped together, and at Grappenhall Heys we move these groups around each year, a practice known as **rotation**. This ensures that any pests or diseases that are common to that vegetable are not allowed to proliferate, and that any 'hungry' vegetables, such as the leafy brassicas, are not allowed to drain the soil of **nutrients**.

We also have what we refer to as a "semi-permanent" bed for growing vegetables that will last for several years, such as asparagus and seakale, and for growing rhubarb and strawberries.

In order to provide vegetables throughout most of the year, some can be classed as **early**, **second early** and **maincrop**. This refers to when a crop can be sown/planted and when it can be harvested, and is commonly used when referring to potatoes, carrots and peas. However, most vegetables are **harvested** in mid to late summer.

Depending on when you visit the gardens, some of the vegetables you may see are:

Globe artichoke, asparagus, climbing French bean, dwarf French bean, broad bean, runner bean, beetroot, Brussels sprouts, broccoli, cabbage, carrot, cauliflower, celery, cucumber, garlic, lettuce, leeks, onion, parsnip, pea, potatoes, radish, salsify, seakale, scorzonera, shallots, spinach, swede and turnip.

Organic or inorganic?

Flavour = freshness. Something that has been allowed to mature and picked and eaten on the same day is going to taste a lot better than something picked before it is ripe and transported across country (or countries).

The Victorian gardeners used a wide variety of poisons (occasionally poisoning themselves!), and most would have embraced the artificial fertilisers and weedkillers (**herbicides**) that we have today.

Although we have these, we also have the knowledge that they can cause harm and so should be used with care. If you 'feed' the soil regularly with compost and manure, it should not be necessary to use fertilisers on the plants. If these are required, it is better to use a 'naturally derived' product such as bonemeal or seaweed.

Although we remain vigilant for the smaller **pests** such as aphid and caterpillar, most of our problems at Grappenhall Heys are caused by larger animals such as pigeons, rabbits and squirrels, and hopefully we can keep these out using physical barriers.

Our one compromise to modern chemicals is the use of herbicides. Unfortunately, the vegetable plots are very vulnerable to weed seeds, and without the work force that the Victorians had, it can be difficult to control these, particularly when the plots are bare. However, we do plant crops known as **green manures**. These are non-edible crops that can be sown to over-winter, keeping the weeds down, and then dug into the soil when the land is required.