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The Horticulturist



Mitigating climate change in British apples and pears

PLUS Urban greening | Saving the world's largest flowers | Skin cancer concerns | AGM 2025 | YHoY Grand Final

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

In an increasingly climatically turbulent world, the scorching summer heat and torrential rains serve as stark reminders of our vulnerability to dramatic weather changes. The newly opened Carbon Garden at Kew Gardens vividly illustrates the critical role carbon plays in sustaining life on earth and emphasises the need for climate action and sustainable solutions.

This garden, a striking addition to Kew, designed by Richard Wilford to communicate the scale of the climate crisis, will captivate visitors with its innovative design and powerful message that includes a colour-banded planting scheme inspired by the climate stripes developed by Professor Ed Hawkins at Reading University.

Kew's Carbon Garden is a pioneering showcase of the essential role plants and fungi play in tackling climate change. It also serves as a glimpse into how our gardens may need to evolve in the future. The garden features multiple areas that explore the intricate relationship between plants, carbon, and the future of our environment.

It also highlights the horticultural skills needed to create, plant and maintain such an ambitious project and the vital role that horticulture plays in highlighting issues and providing practical and applicable solutions.

In early July CIH held a joint Council and Branch Chairs meeting in Maidenhead, which provided a platform for meaningful discussions on education and skills within the horticultural sector.

One of the key issues identified was the visibility of horticultural careers, particularly among careers advisors, students, and parents, and we will develop a Chartered Institute of Horticulture led toolkit aimed at secondary schools, further education providers, and careers events.

The meeting also included an open planning session focused on a '2026 Education Summit' which will replace the traditional CIH Conference for next year given the need for the whole Institute to take action to amplify the excellent work we already do.

The summit will aim to bring together key stakeholders, including government representatives, training providers, colleges, employers, and sector bodies, for a national dialogue on horticultural education. This initiative reflects a commitment to advancing the sector through collaboration, innovation, and strategic planning.

The Carbon Garden at Kew and our focus on education underscore the importance of addressing climate change and promoting horticulture as a vital and professional career path.

Through innovative design, collaborative planning, and targeted advocacy, we can inspire a new generation to engage with horticulture to think about it as a profession and contribute to a more sustainable future.

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Write for *The Horticulturist*

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40TH ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE Climate change is a real and present global danger for horticulture. However, experts and apple and pear growers believe many of the effects can be mitigated and could even bring an opportunity for sector growth and UK food security. **Ali Capper** reports on the challenges and possibilities.

Mitigating climate change in British apples and pears



For centuries British apples and pears have been a fresh produce success story. They are a popular staple of shopping baskets, lunch boxes and fruit bowls, and they grow exceptionally well in our British maritime climate and have a history of adaptability and innovation.

Our growers are expert horticulturists – respected around the world – and can produce premium fresh fruit cost effectively and efficiently. Over hundreds of years, they have adapted and innovated to cope with the many challenges of the weather, pests and disease, supermarket contracts and government policy. They have weathered the storms and continue to produce the best apples and pears in the world.

The biggest threat to apple and pear growers around the world today is climate change.

Impacts on apple and pear growing

Around 70% of the apples and pears we eat in the UK are imported.¹ Much of it coming from ‘climate vulnerable’ countries. As Professor Tim Hess of Cranfield University explained at a recent Next Generation Fruit Growers Conference, almost half (47%) of UK fruit is sourced from climate vulnerable countries and this could be greater than 50% if we start to eat as healthily as we should.

Climate change has significant consequences for farming in other parts of the world, changes in rainfall and temperature alone could equate to a 3.5% reduction in yield and a negative impact on quality. Furthermore, climate change presents increased risk of extreme weather events, such as drought, heatwave, wind and fire. This risk is

particularly prevalent in many of the apple and pear growing areas of mainland Europe. For example, a four degree increase in temperatures in Italy or southern France has been predicted to increase the chances of an extreme weather event by more than 250%.²

Extreme weather events can wipe out an entire crop and events such as droughts put even more pressure on scarce water resources. Apple growing areas including South Africa are already being impacted by water scarcity. Groundwater is being depleted and there is reduced water available for domestic use. In the UK we have already seen media coverage that criticises the growing of fruit in overseas markets that use a lot of water. Chilean villagers claim the British appetite for avocados is leaving locals without water.³