

Growing Orchard Communities

COMMUNITY ORCHARD TOOLKIT



Hosting a Wassail - the nuts and bolts!

An idea of things you might want to think about when planning to host a Wassail.

Roles.

Wassail master and misuss of ceremonies. One or two people lead the wassail. They are in costume, know the order of events, the words and lead the Wassail in role. Someone with a loud voice and sense of occasion is good.

Event host. Chief wearer of the hi-vis jacket, main point of contact who checks the health and safety of the event. There may be several volunteers, give one person the role of being in charge. They may need to announce information to the gathering at the start before handing over to the Wassail leader. The host is a good person to help raise awareness about the orchard too for potential new volunteers.

Stewards. Even for a low-key event it's a good idea to meet stewards and volunteers beforehand to be clear about roles and responsibilities, then everyone knows where they need to be and what their role is.

Health and Safety. Things to bear in mind for a Wassail are: darkness, uneven ground, children (who should be accompanied) fire, tree branches, processions (make sure one person is in the front and another bringing up the rear). A lost children point. Emergency phone numbers, phone and location. Parking. Walking routes. See our toolkit for a risk assessment template you could use.

Licenses. Ask your local council about temporary event notice licenses if you intend to sell alcohol.

Procession. Decide on your route in the early stages of planning as it may impact on your ideas, as well as giving time to check it's the best accessible route for people. Mark out the route. Use ground lanterns or rope. Where is the meeting point? Where is the ending point and where would you like people to stand on arrival? How long will it take? People move slower than you think!

How to make a good procession: keep the group together and avoid straggling. Use music, a chant, a beat to walk to, or even a way of walking. The front people should start slowly as there's a tendency for the front people to gallop off and the procession lose its energy. The front and back stewards can help keep pace and shape.

Scale. What scale of event do you want to put on? Your community orchard group with friends and family, anyone from your town or village, everyone from miles around.

Timings. Time of day, length of whole event, what happens after the Wassail ceremony? Food, morris dancing, a band, stories round the fire, an event in the hall or pub.

Publicity. Who do you want to invite? How will you tell the people you want to come as best you can? Posters, social media, mailing lists, local press. Do they need to bring or wear anything special?

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Creating an atmosphere. How can you make the atmosphere you want? Lighting, fire, lanterns, musicians. Avoid using generators or torches.

Music. Are there local musicians or bands you can invite? Do you want to book professional musicians? When will they play? It could be: at the beginning as people gather, before and during the procession, supporting the wassail ceremony with traditional wassail songs and music, afterwards to make it go with a swing. All the above!

Noise Making. Ask people to bring pots and pans or instruments. Have some spares. (No guns!)

You will need: A Wassail king and queen with crowns, toast (cider soaked bread), wassail cup, cider or apple juice for the libation, the chant, the song, noise makers.

Refreshments. Are there any? If so, what? How will it be organised? Who is doing what? Where will it be served?

Promoting your orchard. Any event is a new opportunity to raise awareness about your orchard and the community orchard group and inspire new volunteers. Organise how, where and when you will do this. How will you organise getting contact details of interested people? There could be an information table or board, people nearby to tell others, publicity material. What's your next get together or work day coming up that you can tell people about? Who will have the role of making sure this happens?

Outcomes.

Complete this sentence - At the end of this event we will have

At the beginning of your planning stages think about what you want to get out of holding a wassail. It could be: have great fun with friends, learn to make wassail drink, encourage more volunteers, practice for a larger event next year, ensure a good crop of apples next year!