



Dandelion

Scotland's Local Food Stories

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Introduction

Did you know that Scotland grows lots of different kinds of food, all with different names and characters, tastes, and tales? You might think a raspberry is just a raspberry, a potato just a potato, but there are in fact many local varieties!

In **'Scotland's Local Food Stories'** you can explore the stories behind some of the heritage or heirloom varieties of fruit and veg that were developed in Scotland, as well as some more modern ones that have been bred by plant experts to grow well in the Scottish climate, such as raspberries and strawberries.

It's not widely known that Scotland has a rich tradition of apple growing, for example – you certainly won't find them in the supermarkets. However, if you look carefully in late summer into autumn, you might see some Scottish varieties in farm shops and independent grocers, with names like James Grieve, Stirling Castle, Tower of Glamis, Arbroath Oslin or White Melrose. Do you have a school or community orchard? Do they grow any heritage varieties?

What are the benefits of having different varieties of a crop? Why is it important to maintain crops that suit a local climate and how can you help?

A basket of local food stories

SOFT FRUIT: raspberries, strawberries and more

If you find a raspberry for sale with the name "Glen" in it, such as Glen Ample, Glen Clova, or Glen Dee, it was bred in Scotland at what is now the James Hutton Institute at Invergowrie, near Dundee. While the commercial growing of soft fruit in Scotland began in Lanarkshire in the 1870s, the areas of Perthshire, Angus and Fife are now well established as the heartland of Scottish soft fruit.

Large scale Scottish raspberry breeding started out at the Institute in the 1950s, and the "Glen" range was launched in 1970. Glen Clova gave yields a huge 30% higher than previous varieties when it was released! Glen Ample is a hybrid of no less than 10 other raspberry varieties and is one of the most widely grown summer fruiting raspberries in the UK. Breeders try lots of different combinations to find higher yields, better resistance to weather and disease, and firmer, tastier berries.



As well as over a dozen types of raspberry, the James Hutton Institute has also raised the "Loch" range of blackberries (Loch Tay, Loch Ness) and over twenty types of blackcurrants in the "Ben" series (such as Ben Connan, Ben Sarek).

Berry picking was a regular summer holiday activity for many people in the 20th century, but the increase in demand from supermarkets for Scottish berries turned soft fruit growing into a large industry, with many people coming to Scotland from Eastern Europe to work on berry farms almost year-round. Berries used to only be a summer fruit, but the berry growing season has been extended by using polytunnels and different varieties, meaning growers can provide fruit from May to October and sometimes even longer.

SUTHERLAND KALE ("Càil Cataibh" in Gaelic)

In 2003, the Real Seeds organisation in Wales, who specialise in older 'heirloom' plant varieties, were sent a sample of kale seed with the following note attached:

"I am sending you some seed of Sutherland Kale given me by an 80-year-old in Sutherland, it's an old variety grown by the crofters. We grew it last season and it's lovely, very tender green leaves on plants that grow waist high...Cooks just like spinach and lasts through the hungry gap."

It was sent to them by Vicky Schilling from Ullapool, who later discovered, "the kale came from Elizabeth Woolcombe, of West Drummie in Sutherland. She is in fact 93, and her daughter has remembered where they got the Sutherland Kale from. It was given to them by a Mr Simmonds about 50 years ago [in the 1950s], he was doing research on kales at Edinburgh University at the time."

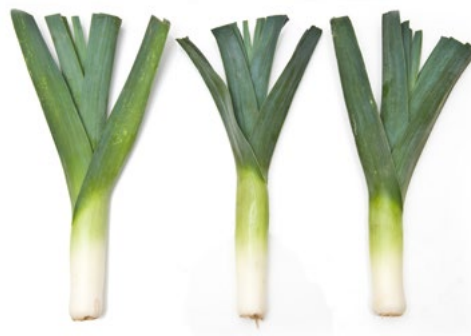
Real Seeds tried it out and say that it is "the most vigorous and resilient kale we have seen. It shrugged off attack by aphids, cabbage white caterpillars, ravenous goats, and 70 mph freezing sleet overwinter. In each case it sprang back, growing new leaves with no trouble, and forming large heads of kale in spring when at its most valuable. And when it starts to bolt in spring, the flowering shoots are good to eat too."

MUSSELBURGH LEEK

Place: Musselburgh, East Lothian

First recorded: 1834

Leeks have been grown in Scotland since the Middle Ages. Like a lot of older plant varieties, the history of the Musselburgh leek is a little lost in the mists of time. It's a Victorian variety from the town in East Lothian, near Edinburgh, introduced in 1834. Some people think it was developed by immigrants from either the Netherlands or France in the late 18th century. Another story goes that a leek variety from mainland Europe was crossed by local growers with wild leek plants found on the shore at Musselburgh. It was said to have become the main market variety in the 1890s and popularised through the trade of 'market gardens' in East Lothian, which supplied the city of Edinburgh. They are shorter and thicker than other varieties, can grow to a large size, and are well suited for colder conditions through the winter. Ideal for Scotland! It can be planted in May and left in the ground to harvest from September through to the spring. An older name for it is 'Scotch Flag'.



COUL BLUSH APPLE

Place: Coul House, Contin, Ross-shire

First recorded: 1827

The Coul Blush came from the gardens of Sir George Mackenzie; Coul House was built for him in 1821. It is now a hotel. His family had lived in the area since 1560, and he was interested in science and nature, especially minerals. He used his mother's diamonds for his experiments! Sir George won a silver medal from the Caledonian Horticultural Society in 1827 for some of the apple varieties he raised. Coul Blush is the most northerly apple in the UK, well-suited to the Highland climate, as it can fall from the tree early if grown in the warmer south.

JAMES GRIEVE APPLE

Place: Edinburgh

First recorded: 1893

James Grieve was born in Peebles in 1841, training as a gardener there from the age of 12 and at Stobo Castle nearby. He moved to Edinburgh in 1859 and eventually worked as the manager at Dickson's plant nursery in the Leith area. He became very well known as a plant breeder, lecturer and flower show judge, and was a member of many of the major horticultural societies in Scotland. In 1893, the James Grieve apple was introduced, winning the Royal Horticultural Society's Award of Merit in 1897. It is now probably the most famous Scottish-bred apple grown across the UK and Europe.

In 1896, Grieve started his own business with his sons at Redbraes Nursery in the Broughton area of Edinburgh where today you can find Redbraes Community Garden. There is a commemorative plaque to him in Northgate, Peebles and his portrait was painted by Henry Wright Kerr and is in the National Galleries of Scotland collection.



National Galleries link James Grieve, 1841 – 1924.
Horticulturist | National Galleries of Scotland



MUCKLE INGINS! (Large onions!)

AILSAS CRAIG ONION

Place: Ayrshire

First recorded: 1887

Ailsa Craig is an island made of granite off the coast of Ayrshire. The rock is used to produce curling stones which are used by Olympic competitors. David Murray was a very competitive plant breeder who, in 1874, became head gardener at Culzean Castle, which looks out onto the island. He had been a gardener since his teenage years, serving his apprenticeship at major gardens across Scotland. One of his interests was trying to grow exotic and tropical plants such as pineapples in Scotland! He created the large onion variety Ailsa Craig in 1887 to try to win competitions and it has remained popular ever since, particularly at garden shows. It has a mild flavour, but does not keep for long in storage, so it needs used quickly.

KELSAE ONION

Place: St Boswells / Kelso

First recorded: 1940s

The Kelsae is named after the Scots name for the Borders town of Kelso, near where it was raised. It was developed by Alfred Breed senior at Mertoun Gardens and passed on to his son Alfred junior in the 1970s; between them they worked at Mertoun for 84 years! There are different stories about how the variety was sold to other seed companies over the years, and that the stock was almost lost in a fire! For a time, it was raised by seed specialists Sinclair McGill on the site of what is now Mayfield Garden Centre in Kelso. As it can also grow very large, it is known as an 'exhibition' onion, sometimes reaching world record weights at gardening shows and competitions.

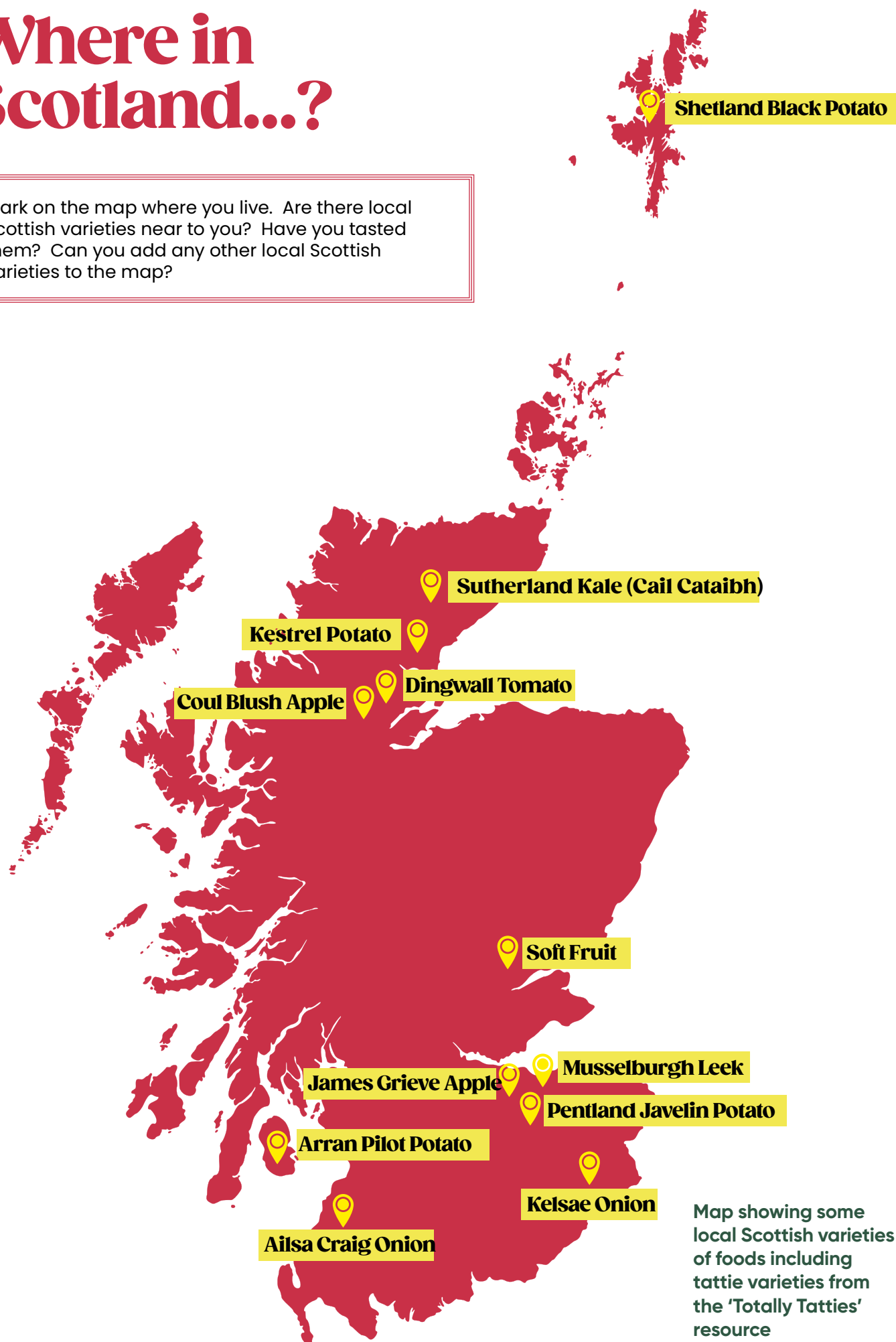


Citizen Fieldwork Questions:

- See if you can find out what food is grown and sold locally. What varieties of fruit or vegetable do people grow in the local area, or what is on sale in local shops and supermarkets? Can you find out where they come from, or any stories behind them?
- Tip: Look at local maps. The history of growing can sometimes be spotted on maps, especially where orchards used to be. Can you spot any places or streets with names such as Orchardfield, Orchard Brae? Farms that are no longer there? Visit the National Library of Scotland's site to see older maps through the ages – try the "side by side" viewer.
- If there are local varieties of fruit or vegetable, what is it about that variety that makes it grow well there?
- What are the conditions for growing food outside near to you? Is there plenty of available land? What sort of soil is there? What is the weather like?
- Tip: The map on the following page may help you. You can add your information to the map.

Where in Scotland...?

Mark on the map where you live. Are there local Scottish varieties near to you? Have you tasted them? Can you add any other local Scottish varieties to the map?



Going to the Berries

Soft fruits are well named. They can be easily damaged, and the fruit can wither fairly quickly after ripening, so how was a field of delicate fruits harvested in the past? It took a whole community of people to do it including a temporary community who would arrive for just that purpose.

Berry picking was a regular summer holiday activity for many people in the 20th century. For local people, adults, and children, it was an opportunity to supplement the family income. Glasgow folk combined it with a holiday. For the Scottish Traveller community, it was an annual opportunity to meet up with friends and family, a time to share news, songs, and stories. Look at these photos of berry picking in Perth and Kinross in the 1930's to the 1960's on Perth and Kinross Archives Twitter feed <https://twitter.com/cpkarchives/status/1271389706622849025>

Listen to this song 'The Berryfields O Blair' written and sung by Traveller singer Belle Stewart on the archive website resource Tobar an Dualchais – Kist O Riches. <https://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/track/44492?l=en>

The song describes her experience of the summer raspberry and strawberry harvest around Blairgowrie in Perthshire and celebrates the people who come to take part – from the industrial, fishing and mining areas as well as Travelling people from all over Scotland and beyond. The song closes by saying, "You'll travel far afore you'll meet a kinder lot than they." You can read all the words of the song on the next page.



Citizen Fieldwork Questions:

- Did anyone in your family or community ever go 'to the berries'? What do they remember about it?



The Berryfields o Blair

written by Traveller singer Belle Stewart

When berry time comes roond each year
Blair's population's swellin,
There's every kind o picker there
And every kind o dwellin.
There's tents and huts and caravans,
There's bothies and there's bivvies
And shelters made wi tattie-bags
And dug-oots made wi divvies.

There's corner-boys fae Glesgae,
Kettle-boilers fae Lochee,
And miners fae the pits o Fife,
Mill workers fae Dundee
And fisherfolk fae Peterheid
And tramps fae everywhere
Aa looking for a livin aff
The berry fields o Blair

There's traivellers fae the Westren Isles,
Fae Arran, Mull and Skye;
Fae Harris, Lewis and Kyles o Bute,
They come their luck tae try.
Fae Inverness and Aiberdeen,
Fae Stornoway and Wick
Aa flock tae Blair at the berry time
The straws and rasps tae pick.

Noo there's some wha earn a pound or twa,
Some cannae earn their keep,
And some wad pick fae morn tae nicht,
And some wad raither sleep.
There's some wha has tae pick or stairve,
And some wha dinnae care,

And there's some wha bless and some wha
curse
The berry fields o Blair.

There's faimlies pickin for one purse,
And some wha pick alane,
And there's men wha share and share alike
Wi wives that's no their ain.
There's gladness and there's sadness tae,
There's happy herts and sair,
For there's comedy and tragedy
Played on the fields o Blair.

But afore I put my pen awa,
It's this I would like to say:
You'll traivel far before you'll meet
A kinder lot than they;
For I've mixed wi them in field and pub
And while I've breath tae spare,
I'll bless the hand that led me tae
The berry fields o Blair.

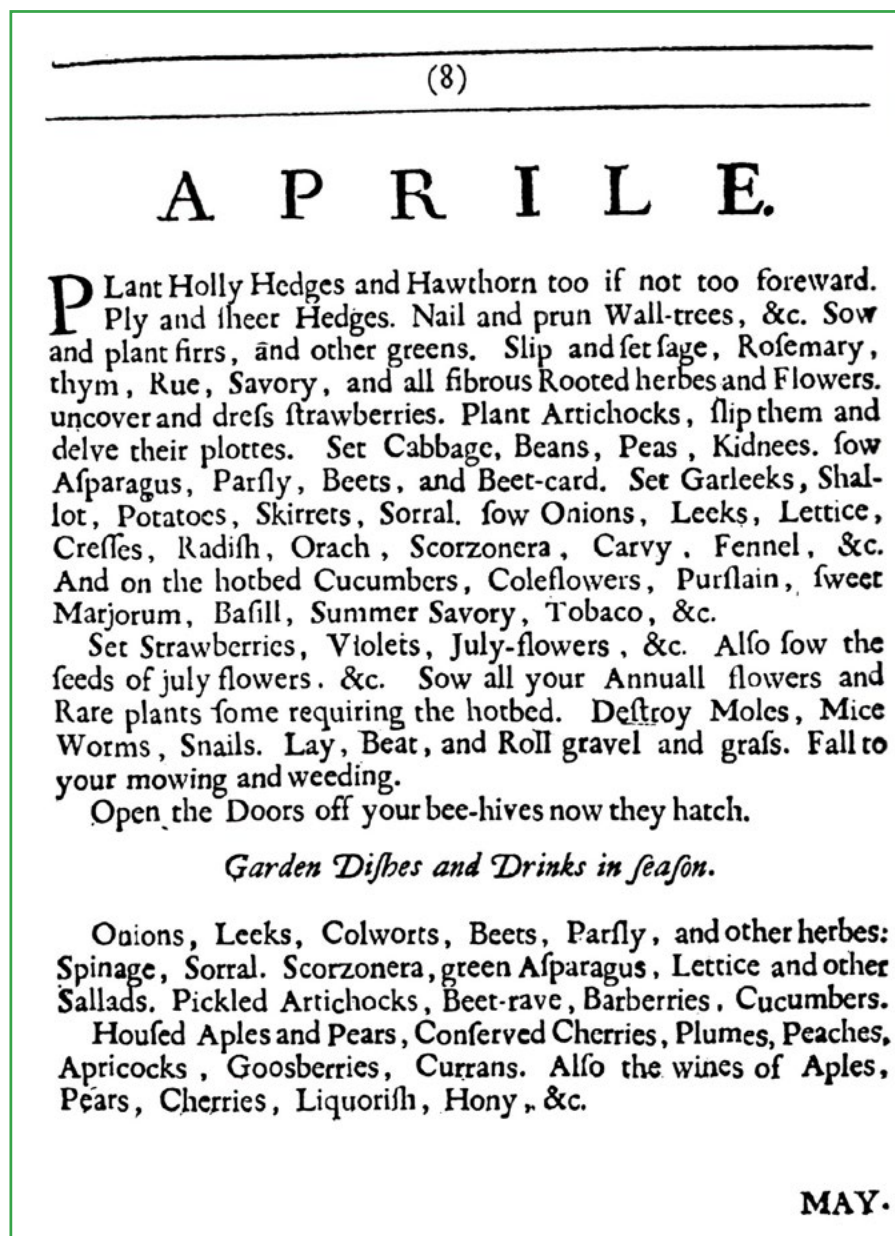


Local plants on your plate

You can probably name different types of food or dishes but how many different plants does that represent? e.g. a bowl of tomato soup could have onion, garlic and basil in it as well as tomatoes.

Modern global trade means that we have access to ingredients from around the world. Does that mean that we eat a wider variety of plants now than people ate in the past? Let's see!

Many different fruits and vegetables have been grown in Scotland for hundreds of years. Take a look at the 'Aprile' page from the first ever Scottish gardening book, *The Scots Gard'ner*, published by John Reid in 1683! See if you can identify what was being grown. Watch out for older spellings and printing styles as well as some unfamiliar veg!



The table on the next page has the list of plants named in the image above. Complete the table individually, in groups, or as a class saying how many in the group or class agree with the statement. You could also start a new table listing some fruit and vegetables that you can eat today that may not have been available in the past.

Scotland's Local Food Stories

Food plant name	This food plant is new to me	I have eaten this food plant	I would like to try this
Cabbage			
Beans			
Peas			
Asparagus			
Parsley			
Beets			
Beetcard			
Chard			
Garlic			
Shallots			
Potato			
Skirret			
Sorrel			
Onion			
Leek			
Lettuce			
Cress			
Radish			
Orach			
Scorzonera			
Carvy (caraway)			
Fennel			
Cucumber			
Cauliflower			
Purslain			
Colworts			
Spinach			
Barberry			
Artichoke			
Strawberry			
Apple			
Pear			
Cherries			
Plum			
Peach			
Apricot			
Gooseberry			
Currants			
Liquorice			

Variety is the spice of life

There are different types of food and there are different varieties of the same type of food. Sixteen different types of potato that were grown by young people across Scotland as part of the 2022 Dandelion project. You can see the different varieties in the game, 'Mash Up'. There are stories about developing new varieties of food plants with characteristics to improve the crop, how it grows, its storage, and its flavour. Despite all this diversity, 75% of the world's food is generated from only 12 plants and five animal species. What is going on?

Since 1945 we have increasingly used a 'monoculture' approach to growing food. Monoculture is where a single crop is grown instead of lots of different types of crops, which is called 'polyculture'. Polyculture has been used through history by different cultures around the world. It uses the natural features of the plants to help them grow and to reduce inputs from people. Growing corn, beans, and pumpkin plants in a group together is a well-known polyculture from North America often called "the three sisters".

Benefits of 'the three sisters' approach are:

- The corn grows tall, and the climbing beans can grow up it.
- The corn needs lots of nitrogen in the soil and the roots of the beans have nodes on them that can produce nitrogen.
- The tall corn and beans provide some shade for the pumpkin.
- The large leaves of the pumpkin shade the soil and keep it moist as well as deterring weeds.
- These crops are easy to store and help provide a balanced diet

Lots of growers use 'companion planting' to improve their chances of a successful crop by recruiting other plants to deter pests for example. There's information online about companion planting that will help you with the next activity e.g. [Soil Association table of companion planting](#), [Friends with benefits advice from Sarah Raven](#), and [10 companion plants to grow from BBC Gardener's World](#).

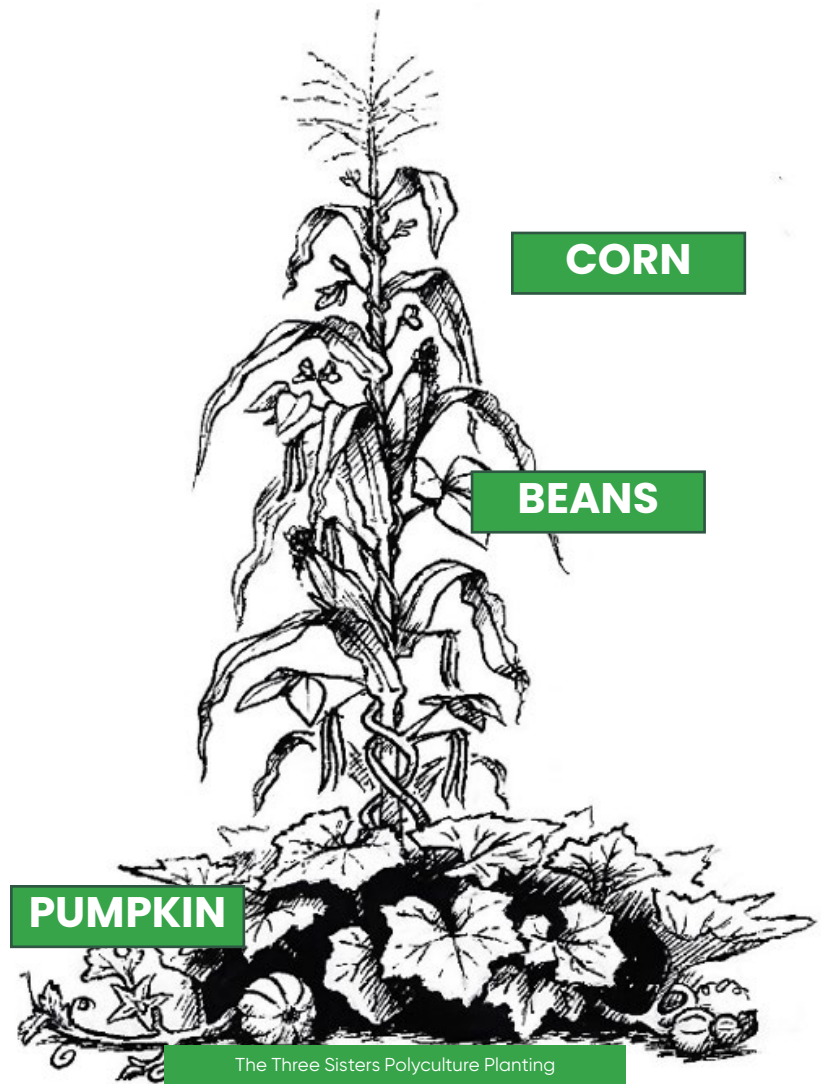
Three sisters plants Image licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International References

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European Commission (13.12.21) Balogh A., Horizon EU research and innovation magazine [<https://ec.europa.eu/research-and-innovation/en/horizon-magazine/rise-and-fall-monoculture-farming>]

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Teaching agrobiodiversity for food and agriculture: a curriculum guide for higher education



Create some variety

Here is an image of a monoculture with all plant roots the same depth. Lots of pesticides have been used on the crop so there is little life in the soil or flying about in the air. If it rains heavily, the soil could be washed away.

Imagine that you are in charge of this patch of land and that you want to grow more than one type of plant. Draw on the image to add in your different plants. Remember different plants will have different root depths that allow them to find more water and nutrients. Can some of your plants make nutrients (like the beans make nitrogen)? Will you include any plants to attract pollinators? Are there any plants that can help to deter pests?

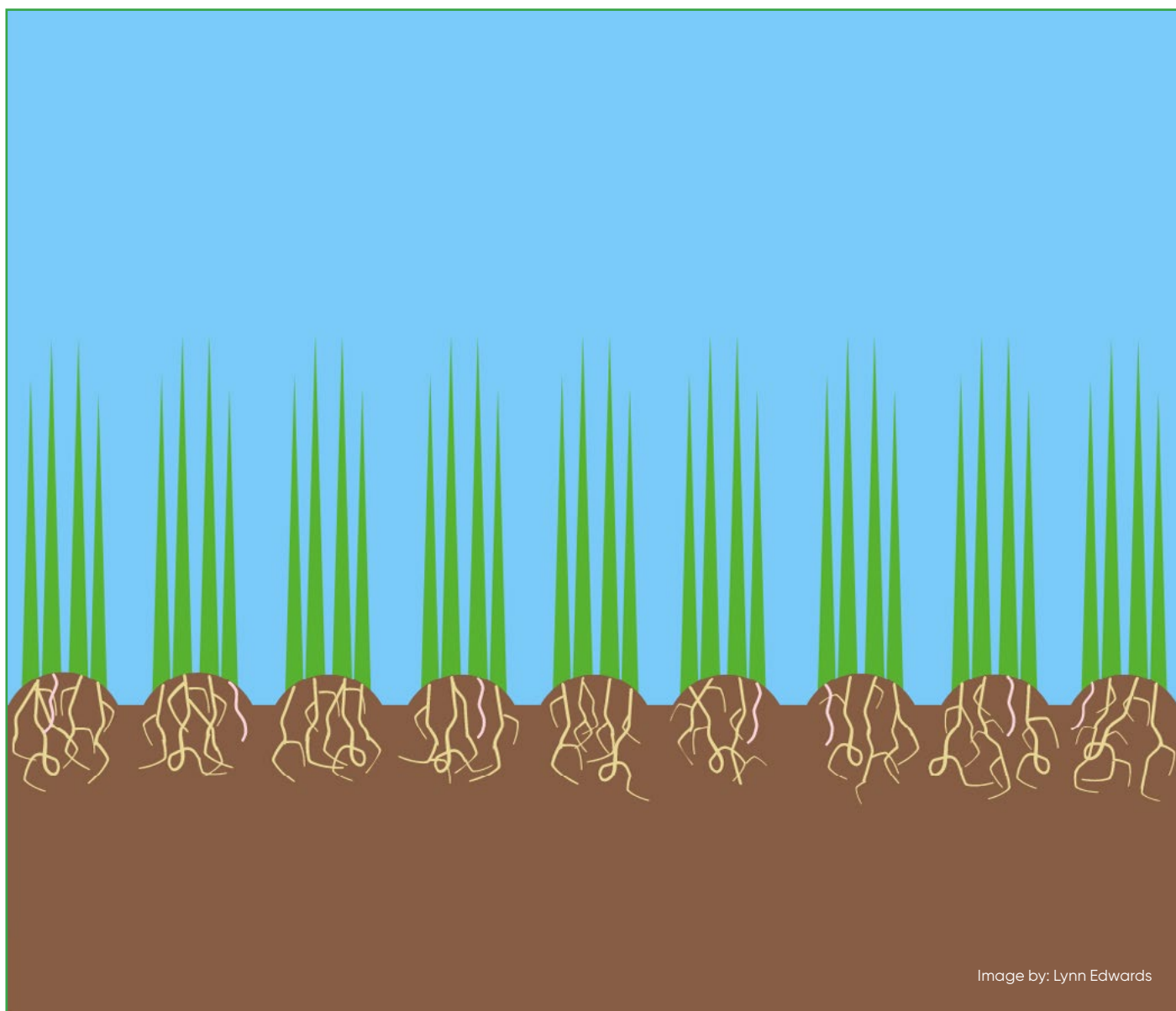


Image by: Lynn Edwards

Curriculum for Excellence

Experiences and Outcomes

Activities in this brochure support these curricular outcomes.

level	CfE label	explanation
2	SOC 2-08a	I can discuss the environmental impact of human activity and suggest ways in which we can live in a more environmentally- responsible way.
2	TCH 2-06a	I can analyse how lifestyles can impact on the environment and Earth's resources and can make suggestions about how to live in a more sustainable way.
2	TCH 2-07a	I can make suggestions as to how individuals and organisations may use technologies to support sustainability and reduce the impact on our environment.
2	LIT 2-10a	"I am developing confidence when engaging with others within and beyond my place of learning. I can communicate in a clear, expressive way and I am learning to select and organise resources independently."
3	SOC 3-05a	I can describe the factors contributing to a major social, political or economic change in the past and can assess the impact on people's lives.
3	SOC 3-08a	I can identify the possible consequences of an environmental issue and make informed suggestions about ways to manage the impact.
3	TCH 3-05a	I understand how scientific and technological developments have contributed to changes in everyday products.
3	LIT 3-28a	I can convey information, describe events, explain processes or concepts, and combine ideas in different ways.
4	TCH 4-05a	I can analyse products taking into consideration sustainability, scientific and technological developments.
4	TCH 4-06a	I can examine a range of materials, processes or designs in my local community to consider their environmental, social and economic impact.
4	SOC 4-08a	I can discuss the sustainability of key natural resources and analyse the possible implications for human activity.
4	SOC 4-09a	Having evaluated the role of agriculture in the production of food and raw material, I can draw reasoned conclusions about the environmental impacts and sustainability.

This resource has been researched and brought together by three creative ethnologists, Steve Byrne, Mairi McFadyen and Gary West with editing for school use by Eve Keepax from Keep Scotland Beautiful. An ethnologist is a person who observes and records people's experience of life, their connections to each other, to places, to the past, to what they value and why, to their culture. Creative ethnology involves finding imaginative ways to share people's stories, encouraging us to notice connections from the past to the present and possibly into the future.

Dandelion

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