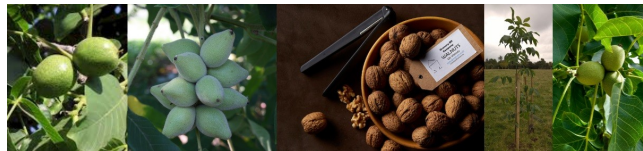




Granary Oils & Warwickshire Walnuts



September 2026

We're finally at the end of August 2026, into September and the weather has finally broken and we've had around an inch of rain and it's finally cooled down a bit, only low to mid 20's C now thankfully, but the damage has already been done.

I should explain at this point that our whole focus is to produce a sustainable orchard of trees that last for generations, not an intense, heavy fertiligated and managed orchard that you would find in traditional commercial orchards in southern Europe and around the world. In these systems the inputs are high, including water (up to 70L a day in the summer per tree), cropping intense and trees are in decline and often ripped out around 35 years. This is undesirable in a whole number of ways not least of which is the short lifespan & increased costs, it's not practical either as a lot of the chemicals, organic or otherwise aren't licenced for the UK. The compromise is in harvest quantity and being more susceptible to disease, but good husbandry and management can reduce that though and this is what we're attempting to do.

We had above average rainfall up to mid June but nothing after that until Thursday 27th August apart from a couple of showers earlier in August. We replaced a lot of young (1-3 years) trees after last year's drought that weren't good enough and we're faced with the same problem this year but with a lot more trees. Most of our Broadview & Buccaneer (10-11 year old) have proved very poor and will come out as most have died even with some irrigation this summer, they do not appear to like hot dry conditions, in contrast Lara, Franquette and a few others seem to do well.

Now some of this is down to individual trees and their location and how well we've looked after them with irrigation, however in a summer like this there is a limit to what drip irrigation can accomplish, average temperatures for July were over 20C and August looks very similar with peaks at 37/38C. Young transplanted trees with very limited roots systems simply have a tipping point where perspiration exceed water intake and this has been compounded in our older orchard (all grazed agroforestry) by being unable to mulch due to the sheep.

This exposes the grass/soil to full sun exposure and on our clay even the ridges on which the trees are planted have big cracks, the joys of a deep clay soil. I feel that when we replant this winter a mulching solution will have to be found, the only practical one I can think of at the moment is to use Re-bar and chicken wire to create a metre square area in which I can dump tree chippings that will stop the sheep dispersing it. Maybe this won't work though unless I can keep the ewes & lambs out of the wire?

In addition we've invested in two 10,000L water storage tanks for one of the barns and we'll build a big bowser solution that will allow us to irrigate larger quantities on new trees in another emergency situation, a big soak every week would have got many of the trees through, the older trees are better able to cope and indeed many had no problem beyond nut size. Bear in mind that lack of water affects nut set & eventual size not just tree vigour, many of our nuts are smaller this year again and the stressed ones have been shedding wrinkled nuts early. In addition this spring had a lot of very minor frosts up until the 10th May which affected a lot of trees with nut set.

On a positive note our new orchard which is only 3 years old has done well, even though it has struggled since it's planting at the end of 2022 with the tail end of one drought, the wettest 18 months on record here and then 2 droughts back to back. When we planted we decided 300+ new drippers to monitor wasn't practical so each tree had a 30cm spur of soaker hose under mulch with the aim of leaving it on for 8 hours a few rows at a time to give them a small amount of water stress free! It was clear this was optimistic and in last years drought it wasn't enough, so each 30cm got a couple of 2mm drilled holes to increase water flow and with a good mulch it worked well with some constant rotational irrigation. The original trees that haven't been replaced since planting have grown up to 1m although it varies tree by tree.

This year in this orchard I'm upgrading our lightweight mesh guards with heavier ones as the roe bucks have destroyed them too easily (30 trees this spring) and I aim to find time to chip a lot of willow and blackthorn to give a deep mulch on all 300+, yard manure doesn't last long and the replacement trees this year will need plenty of help. The orchard isn't grazed due to the cost of the weld mesh and extra posts on planting, the aim is to begin grazing at year 6-7 but we'll see, it's heavy clay with a PH from 5.00-8.00 and 30m higher in elevation on a hill so less frost risk.

The 1st picture below shows the heavy mesh spirals I'm now using, the same ones we use on our older trees as we remove the metal mesh when they become free standing and no longer need posts.



At the same time I'm pruning out excess lower growth or secondary leaders and sometimes finding the trees just isn't good at all and that the rootstock has a shoot better than the very poor grafted scion which means it's time to replace it.



Often it's a balance between replacing a poor looking young tree or leaving it because you think it will really take off next year, I'm finding that something a year or two after planting maybe will recover, something that's been in for 3-4 years won't and it'll only need to come out next year!

Irrigation & tree establishment

Over the past few years we've supplied a lot of walnut trees to new growers and tried to help them get established growing walnuts commercially in many cases. We always stress the importance of irrigation planning, ideally in situ but at minimum having a bowser/slurry tanker and the ability to water regularly. Most take this on board but we still get the response from some that they live in a 'wet' area and it will be fine, invariably we then get calls, emails and photos of stressed or dead trees.

Now this isn't always lack of water after planting although that is certainly a big part of it, in some cases trees have been heeled in for weeks/months and we suspect the root systems dried out, which is a big factor in trees not breaking bud in the first place. However I'd suggest the biggest issue is that young roots need constant water & nutrient to grow and establish and it just doesn't rain that evenly. 2" of rain and nothing for weeks won't be enough unless you have fantastic soil and the sun isn't out, 4-8 weeks of constant sun and warm/hot temperatures even with a few showers thrown in will stress and probably kill them, but at best will compromise the future potential.

Remember that we're trying to establish a future crop that will keep on giving for 100+ years, money does on grow on walnut trees but not much if it's compromised at the start, 2-3kg a year is a lot less income than 20-30Kg a year for a well grown tree at 20-25 years old.

I have been guilty of getting the heeling in wrong on a few bare-root trees spare this year. I had 20+ that I heeled into the veg garden (lovely deep loam) and promptly forgot about them until mid March. When I pulled them out the roots were pretty dry even with all the rain, I'd covered them with a foot of loam, probably pressed it down too firmly and the rain couldn't penetrate, I lost over 50% just to lack of bud break and another 25% in the summer heat. Even in a cold store (which I'd like to get) they still need damping down periodically.



This is what you get if the tree gets stressed (8th June), which this year is almost inevitable in a newly transplanted tree. This one was one of our surplus trees planted into the garden, they'd dried out a bit and I didn't water enough when they were put in, a soaker hose went on in early July. The tree is alive and reshooting and will catch up by next year if I pay attention, this will be used as a replacement in our orchards.

The last few years have been difficult in a lot of Europe for nursery growers as well, very late season growth and mild winters have meant that growing tips haven't hardened off properly, soft growth when you get trees is an indication. Thankfully walnuts have growth buds all the way up the stem so they reshoot and catch up unlike many other hardwoods.

On a practical note trying to get the same amount of water on each tree is a challenge and very hard to monitor, especially with drip irrigation once the dripper is hidden by grass/mulch etc. I am going to mole a new water pipe to the far side of our original orchard so that we can water from both ends of each row to equalise distribution and we'll

finally bury the pipes at each end and install row taps so it's all a lot simpler.

We should have done this originally but we planted 3 rows a year so it was easier just to have a long hose and connect to each row. The new orchard was done like this and it is so much easier to manage.

Pollination

Last winter we decided to purchase a very late season pollinator from France. This followed years of monitoring flowering times in the UK and coming to the conclusion that our maritime climate and northerly position means that flowering doesn't always follow established walnut growing regions in terms of male/female flowering relationships.

Specifically our female flowers start and continue quite a bit later than in more southern European regions in some years, for example we often see Franquette, Lara, Fernor flowering into the first and second week of June. This often because of a cool frosty late winter and early spring delaying bud break. Traditional commercial male pollinators are almost always well over by then and even our local seedlings have usually finished by 5-6th June. I'd seen the French cultivar Meylanaise flowering here very late, male flowers not starting until the end of May and continuing until the 3rd week of June in some cases. In French pollination tables it shows Ronde de Montignac as slightly later which we already supply, I haven't seen a mature RDM in flower in the UK to judge hence we've planted and supply both and as both produce good crops of nice nuts there is no downside.

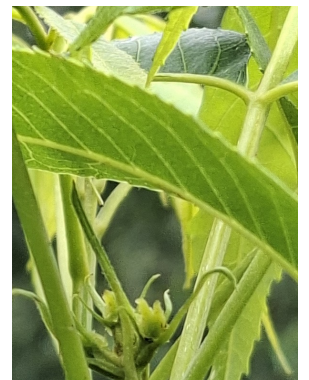
The Meylanaise we can supply are in very limited numbers and grafted in Holland and smaller than the other trees we supply, we have a few that are 2 year old grafts and I expect to get some more from France this winter but they are much more expensive, you don't need many thankfully.

Pecans & Hicories

It's 8 years since we first starting planting Carya, Pecans and Hickories and Hicans and it's fair to say they are much slower than walnuts in all things. This last 12 months we've lost 3 of our largest trees, 1 of each type that were all grafted onto pecan rootstock, which is all happy and reshooting after the scion died (for no discernible reason other than spite maybe?). Graft union looks perfect in all 3 but they all died anyway, I've seen this in grafted oaks a lot but not in the walnut family before.

On a positive side we saw our first Carya flowers on a Warren 346 pecan, no nuts though as there was no male flowers but it's a start, I was warned 6-8 years initially and I've seen Ton Friesen's trees in the Netherlands loaded with nuts so I never doubted they would fruit.

I managed to get a lot of young freshly grafted trees from our Dutch colleague this year to grow on for sale this year and next, I won't order more this autumn for next year as there is too much else to do with our new farm shop to build.



These are all in air-pots and have had a hard life so far, arriving at the start of the heat and living in a big tunnel. Even on irrigation twice a day temperatures have been relentless but they're all alive and growing thankfully.

Heartnuts, butternuts & black walnuts

I get asked how quickly these other walnuts species will fruit and I have to say it varies, Heartnuts seem to be a bit quicker but they all flower within 3-4 years but the Heartnuts seem to set fruit straight away here, probably as we have a 20 year old seedling one that has lots of male flowers. The other species don't have much male flower yet and don't seem keen on cross pollinating with the other walnut species here, they will occasionally hybridise but it's a rare event. A lot of the newly grafted trees used scion wood that has dormant female flowers so we often have trees in pots or in nursery beds with nuts on them. Heartnut Anneke seems quite keen on doing this and has large fat nuts, bigger than most other cultivars it would seem.

It appears people are getting approval again for walnut agroforestry systems which is great news, my advice as always is to build your business model on doing it without grants though and if/when you get grant money you're profitable that much quicker. Don't forget though that invoices for capital items must be dated after approval dates, most suppliers will 'help'.

I'm still not convinced about their [TE8 guarding stipulations](#) either for use with sheep. Bear in mind that a happy walnut will grow a metre or more in the second and subsequent years and for the first few years needs supporting and tying in/strapping as it grows ,often during the growing season to stop soft new growth getting damaged by rubbing or birds landing on it.

Option 1 doesn't specify the diameter of the post/rail/netting guard so make it too small and the lambs at least will have their heads through the netting and munching anything in sight and you will still need an inner guard against rabbits/squirrels etc. It was also be an absolute nightmare for training/pruning/supporting the tree when it grows if you can't get inside it easily.

Option 2 is a better option but again isn't that practical with sheep unless you use extra posts, 3 or 4 I would think to support a 2m length of mesh. 2m means a diameter of 60cm (maximum diameter) and unless you're using 3mm / 10 gauge wire sheep will buckle this rubbing on it pretty quickly with only 2 posts. We use 2.5mm / 12 gauge and at 1m length it gives a 30cm diameter cage that is much stronger and is good with 2 posts but that doesn't seem to be an option that will pass and evidence inspection. Even so they can be easily lifted off for tree maintenance by using cable ties!

In practice you get paid £74.74 so use 3-4 60mm posts, 1.8m high 50mm x 50mm 12g wire that you can buy in 25m rolls and you'll be under that comfortably which will help with the cost of the grafted tree (they only pay £17), irrigation, cable ties, a central cane to tie the tree to and any other costs.

They are also vague with their wording and it specifies a 2m length which doesn't necessarily mean a 2m length not overlapping to form a smaller diameter which seems wasteful or as has been pointed to me it could mean 2m high instead which you could claim is how it was understood, you can buy 2.1m weld mesh. I wouldn't go beyond 50x50mm squares either if you have lambs, hares or rabbits.

Personally I think now I would go with the TE19 option as it's only 30cm diameter so more robust and it'll be easier to manage if you use cable ties. The down side is they want 3m of barbed wire around it which is unnecessary but there you go.

We're finally starting our small farm shop which we hope will secure the future of our walnut & oil sales. At present although we sell online the vast majority of our nuts are sold from the farm gate, ie my mums converted cowshed. She's now 89 and although she loves the customer contact it's a lot of work and doesn't provide future security for the business.

It's a leap of faith going to a farm shop, not to mention a considerable investment even as a self build, but we believe it's our best long term option. We will do tea/coffee & cakes and add other products, either produced on the farm or locally to increase foot fall.

I suspect retail trees will be sold through here as well in small numbers and eventually we'll charge for guided group tours as well as our growing courses.

