

# ALASKA PIONEER FRUIT GROWERS NEWSLETTER

Winter 1997-1998

Volume 13, Number 1

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Membership Information and Dues Payments: Contact Debbie Hinchey

## FEBRUARY MEETING ANNOUNCEMENT

The monthly meeting for February will be held on Thursday, Feb. 12, 1998 at Boyer Photography, 2813 North Star, Anchorage. Phone 561-2885. Located on North Star, one block west of Matanuska Dairy and McDonalds, between Northern Lights and Benson.

On the agenda:

- Bring your scionwood wish-list
- A video on pruning apple trees

## HAVE YOU PAID YOUR 1998 DUES?

**To see whether or not your dues are up to date, check the date on your printed mailing label. Send a check for \$16 to Alaska Pioneer Fruit Growers Association, c/o Debbie Hinchey at the above address. This will be your LAST newsletter if your dues are not received by April 1.**

## MINIMIZING ORCHARD DAMAGE CAUSED BY ICE STORMS

*by Dwight Bradley*

The recent ice storm that devastated parts of Quebec and New England was the worst in living memory. Ice storms in that part of the world are fairly common between October and April when the air above a warm front is above freezing, and the air below it is below freezing. What made this particular storm so bad was that the rain was heavy and lasted for many days, eventually building up as

much as 1-2" of ice on trees. Evidently, a fairly narrow range of elevations was affected: ambient temperatures were above freezing at the highest and lowest elevations, but the middle elevations were below freezing so ice coated everything.

In large parts of northern New England, virtually every mature hardwood tree was either damaged or killed. newspaper account showed a 100-year-old maple sugar orchard which consisted of 15,000 trees, reduced to a stand of toothpicks surrounded by tangled branches. I have not yet heard any detailed reports on damage to apple orchards, but pictures I've seen of various fifty-year-old apple trees look pretty sorry.

All this has prompted me to wonder what I would do about it if the ice storm of the century were to strike my 80-tree apple orchard in Peters Creek. In other words, what would I do if I looked out at 5 AM and to see all the work I've put into the past six years threatened. I would be interested in getting your ideas. Here are mine.

- Hot-water sprays. Using an adapter that screws into the tap of a kitchen sink, it would be fairly easy to set up a lawn sprinkler in the orchard that would spray hot tap water onto ice-coated trees in the orchard. Or, a person might just put an adjustable spray nozzle on the hose and melt the ice off each each tree one by one. I can imagine needing to monitor tthe situation pretty closely, so as to not keep blasting a tree with hot water after its ice falls off. Question: exactly how hot would each drop of water still be when it landed?
- Chemical sprays. I have a five gallon, hand-held spray rig that I use for foliar feeding. There are lots of things besides hot water that would melt ice, but I would be reluctant to

apply anything like windshield de-icer, for fear of causing long-term damage. However, various salts might work, dissolved in a five-gallon pail of hot tap water. I suspect that the best salt to use would be a soluble fertilizer such as potassium nitrate, containing, as it does, two of the three components of N-P-K. Road salt is cheap and available, but would be bad for soil and vegetation alike, a well-known side-effect of road salting in the Lower 48.

- Other short-term measures. Space heaters? Smudgepots? Small bonfires? Shaking off the ice by hand? Propping up loaded branches?
- Long-term measures: Maintain strong crotch angles on scaffold branches. Defoliate your trees as soon as the growing season ends (by hand if by no other method).

### BURGUNDY AND WOLF RIVER APPLES RIPENED IN ANCHORAGE

by Dwight Bradley

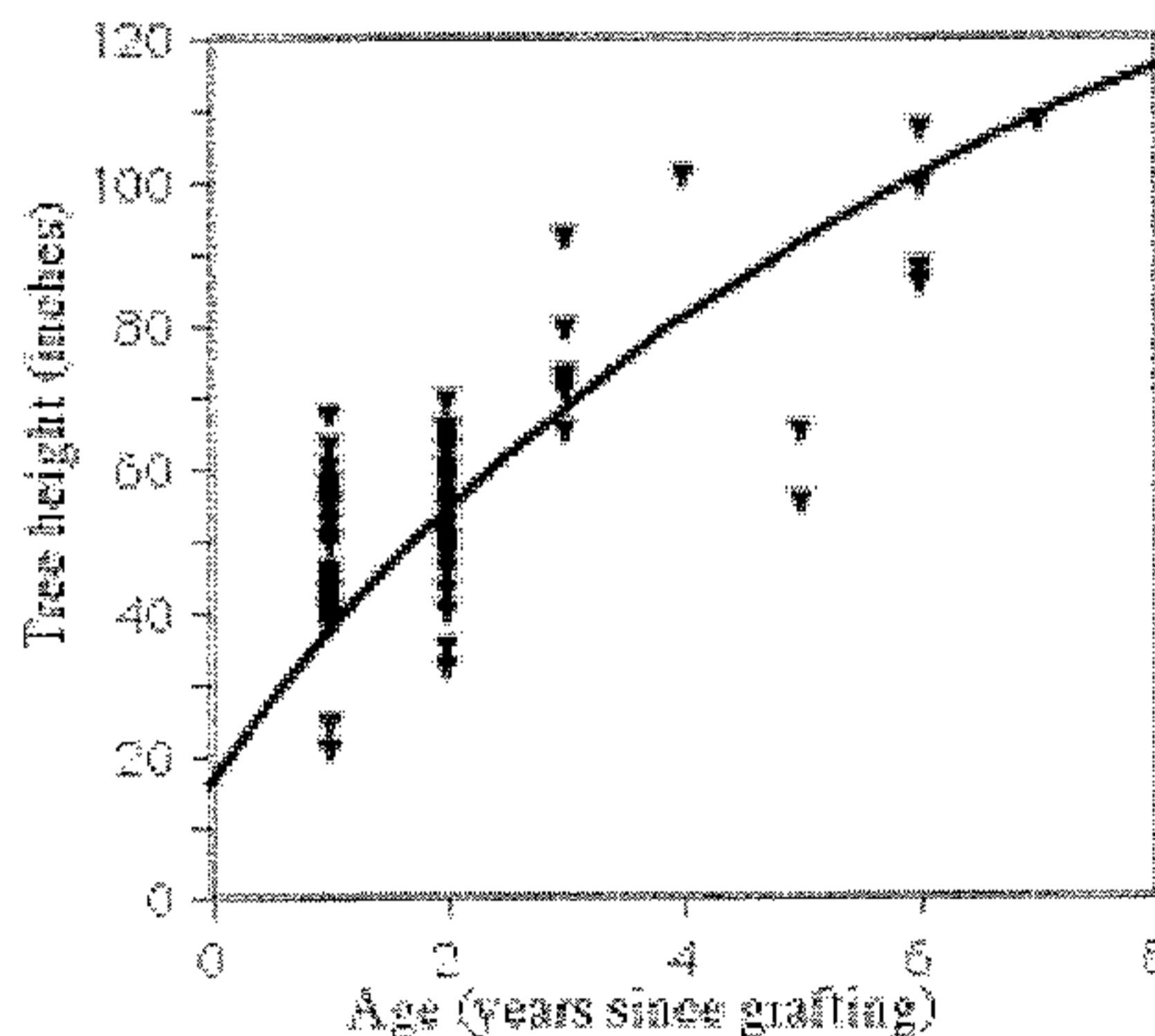
The **Burgundy** apple is a large, red, relatively new variety that has some promise as a commercial variety in the colder apple-growing parts of upstate New York and northern New England, and southern Quebec. Pam Warner reports that her Burgundy tree ripened its first fruit this past growing season — probably a first in south-central Alaska. The tree has quite a history. I got Burgundy scionwood in 1992 from the New York State Cooperative Fruit Testers group in Geneva, NY. I grafted several Burgundy trees — including the one that Pam now has — onto Antonovka rootstock. I had more of these than I needed, and gave one, in a pot, to Eric Simpson, who gave it to Pam Warner when he moved away a year or two later. It is now seven-and-a-half feet tall, planted at the southwestern corner of her house (2-3 feet from the building, which Pam thinks is a little too close). The fruit (three apples), when picked in late September, was large, red, with some green on the shoulders, and the seeds were not quite fully brown. The taste was sweet with tart overtones. I think Burgundy would be worthy of further testing, but it will need some special conditions like Pam's: southern exposure, close to a house or fence. The other Burgundy/Antonovka trees that I grafted in 1992 and planted in my unfavorable spot in Peters Creek have been dead for a few years now. A grower I know in a cold Zone 3 location in northeastern Vermont is very enthusiastic about Burgundy. It might do well in Haines.

Bob Boyer found out that a topworked branch of **Wolf River** also produced for the first time this past growing season. The basic tree, located in the backyard of Tony Route, is a large Siberian crab that was probably planted in the 1920's. It is in the next yard north of the "8th & M" tree that has been mentioned in several past newsletters. Bob Boyer topworked several varieties, including Wolf River, onto this crab about four years ago. The Wolf River has bloomed before, but this is the first year that it set fruit. Tony Route reported that it was huge (3.5 inches), but did not mention anything about how ripe or edible it was. In northern New Hampshire, Wolf River ripens in late September, about 5 weeks after Yellow Transparent, and for that reason I've always doubted that it will ripen in Anchorage. It is generally described as a cooking apple, but in my experience, fresh-picked Wolf Rivers are excellent for fresh eating.

### APPLE-TREE GROWTH CURVE

by Dwight and Dan Bradley

We measured the height of all 77 apple trees in our orchard in Peters Creek. The graph shows height plotted against age for each tree. The visually best-fit curve suggests that a typical tree in our orchard would be about 55 inches tall at age 2, 80 inches at age 4, and 100 inches at age 6. The data also show the how much attrition there has been. We've planted an average of 20 or so trees every year since 1992 but most of the living trees are two years or younger. Neither the growth rate nor the survival rate are much to brag about, but here it is.



Did you know: the average American eats 18 pounds of apples per year. The average Dutch person eats 130 pounds!



Letter to Dwight Bradley from Bob Purvis

641 Hoffman Road  
Selah, WA 98942  
November 15, 1997

Dear Dwight,

The Fall 1997 issue of the Alaska Pioneer Fruit Growers Newsletter came in the mail yesterday. Enclosed with this letter are my 1997 dues, a check for \$15. I thought I'd write and share with you how things went here this year with the orchard, especially with the apple, pear, cherry, plum, and apricot trees I have that would ripen in Anchorage.

First, however, I want to express my appreciation and thanks to you, Bob Boyer, and Pam Meiswenger Warner for all the time and effort you've put in over the last several years to publish the Newsletter and to lead the APFG. I am rejoicing also in the willingness of Kevin Irving, Debbie Hinchey, and Bert Gore to serve in leadership positions. In today's world, it's often hard to find people willing to serve as such in nonprofit organizations such as ours. Please convey to the three of them my best wishes and prayers for their success. It's wonderful to see the group that I helped to found and lead, continuing to meet and to master the art of getting trees to survive and fruit in Alaska.

Also, a tip of my Columbia Reach baseball cap to Tom Marshall for a well-written article about his Orinole apple tree. I sure enjoyed reading that; it brought back a lot of fond memories, and I was glad to hear how large and productive the tree now is. Sad to say, Orinole just doesn't cut it in this climate. The apples get huge, and the tree's vigor on a Mark rootstock was quite sufficient, but because they come ripe about the first week of August, they are soft and bland. July 20-Aug. 10 is when we normally get our hottest weather. So, I cut down my Orinole in the fall of 1995. Sunrise is another apple that tolerates heat very poorly in my location, ditto Naran.

On the other hand, Ginger Gold performs very well here in terms of flavor, firmness, and ability to tolerate heat. As you may know, it is being grown commercially by some growers in the Yakima Valley and also on the East Coast. I would rank it as one of the very best early yellow apples that there is. Is Pristine as good as G.G.? In a few years I'll know!

Here is a story idea: Ask the people who submitted the various apple varieties for the apple-tasting party when the fruit ripened for them. I would love to do an article comparing ripening dates in Anchorage or Chugiak or Palmer with what I proposed as ripening dates in my 1986 table of ripening dates, also with when these same varieties ripen for me. I think there may be much to be learned from that. Could another member of the APFG ~~was~~ be willing to make some calls? I no longer have a current roster of the membership, and it would be very expensive to call a lot of people from here.

A propos to your comment that "There was very little correlation between sugar content and apparent sweetness of the apples," I would suggest that that might be because the sugars were being overshadowed by the acidity still present.

With regard to September Ruby, my two trees on Antonovka produced a good crop this year, and I was delighted to discover how much my wife, Connie, liked the apple because she dislikes many summer apples. Vista Bella bore a good crop for me this year on a tree that I grafted in Jan. 1994 on an M.26 rootstock, and it was firm and tart-sweet, excellent for a pie, fully red and of a good size.

Merland continues to be a disappointment here. It comes ripe just as we get our hottest weather and it just can't stand the heat. Furthermore, it is competing with late

sweet cherries and apricots for our attention. However, I remember Hunter Carleton saying that in 1996, a very cool year in NE Washington, Norland was of exceptional quality.

I was thinking seriously of cutting down my "Deerborn's Unknown" tree because it was suffering problems similar to the Norland, which it rather resembles. However, it came ripe and was picked just before the heat hit this year, and it was firm, sweet, and of good quality. Grafted to an EMLA.7, the tree is very productive.

Ferland is OK here, better than Norland or Oriole although it ripens at the hottest part of the summer, late July. My tree is on Antonovka, but I hope to re-graft to Bud. 9 or M.26.

I have the red sport, Rada Mantet, of Mantet and find that it tolerates the heat pretty well. Be aware that Mantet is a bit susceptible to powdery mildew. The fruit quality was better on a 3-year-old tree on Bud.9 than on a 6-year-old tree on Antonovka in the orchard.

Centennial and Freshman both do pretty well here, and I had my first fruits off a Bud.9-rooted Goodland this summer. Even though I picked Goodland kind of late, I was pleased with the size and flavor. The Kerr apple/crab is the best quality of these, however, and when really ripe looks somewhat like and tastes somewhat like a Winesap. Kerr on Antonovka is a productive, reliable tree, and the apples are highly heat-tolerant here.

Hayar 20 on Ranetka is a nice, well-formed tree in my orchard, but although the fruits are large, I'm not that impressed with the flavor. This tree is scheduled for removal this winter because I am trying to get rid of all trees on Ranetka, Antonovka, and Mark over the next couple years and to replace them with the same varieties on Bud.9, M.26, and EMLA.7 (or possibly on the new Cornell-Geneva series roots).

The Enigma apple fruited for me this year. On Antonovka, it's a fairly vigorous but moderately productive tree. The fruits were large, and both Connie and I liked the flavor (sweet/tart) and texture. I am confident it would ripen in Anchorage and quite likely even in Chugiak for you.

The quality of PF-51 and especially Norkent was such that I sold them commercially at the Selah Farmers' Market this summer, but I would have sold more had they been larger. PF-51 sets fruit like a crabapple. *aside from Norland,*

I was surprised to see that not one of the Nor- series apples was listed on the apple-tasting (sic.) words is impressive here and in spite of being on a small tree, the fruits did not sunburn nor break down internally. Norson is nearly as good; Norhey, slightly less so. Norcue does best in cooler temperatures but seems to be a bit more heat-tolerant than Norland. I will be planting a Norot next spring, and by 1999 other Nor- series apples should be available (Norlove, Norbil, Norrusset, Norkent, etc.) from St. Lawrence Nurseries.

We had a terrific apricot crop this year, and I was able to sell most of my Westcoats, M.604's and Debbie's Bards to the neighbors. The flavor was great, but I should have gone more thinning, earlier, for better size. The mid- and late-season cots (Puget Gold, Hanglow, Harlayne, DR-606) were even better and sold very well at the farmers' market. Even though this is a major fruit-growing district, there aren't very many people raising apricots commercially in the Yakima Valley, and some of the more popular commercial cultivars, such as Perfection and Rival, really don't taste that great. I think it's ironic that in my cold, late district that I have much better success with my cots than the commercial growers in the Lower Yakima Valley.

The Opal plum tree won many friends this summer, and although it is not noted for being a keeper, my neighbor Jack Bender ate Opals from the 'fridge at his home as late as



mid October and said they still tasted great! I was pleased at the performance also of the Bourne Biffard pear tree I planted in 1993. It had a moderate crop (its first) and excellent fruit size; in fact, some of the pears rivaled Bartlette in size! I sold about 15-20 lb. to the service manager at Owen Suzuki, and he went nuts over them. (He's a pear lover.) My Summercrisp had its first crop (a large one), but I picked them just a bit on the late size, and many of them went into the garbage. Our associate pastor's wife made some into a pear pie, however, and it tasted great. Sauvignac pear (from St. Lawrence) bore a good crop, and although they aren't as sweet as a Biffard, the flavor was still very good, and they will keep for about 2-3 months. I'm sure Biffard would ripen for you guys, also Summercrisp (and their bloom dates overlap), but Sauvignac would be a little more chency.

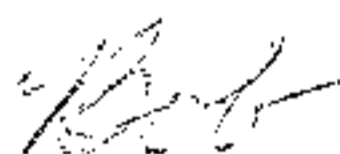
Lastly, I must mention that my Meteor pie cherry had huge fruits, a heavy crop, and moderate terminal growth this year, and the fruits hung and kept well for a long time on the tree. Who could ask for anything more? The Ball cherry from St. Lawrence fruited, and I planted a Surecrop tart cherry also.

I'll try and write a more specific article for the Newsletter about ripening dates on the above-mentioned fruits. This will involve reading through my journal. Also must comment here in passing that better tree nutrition would probably do a lot to improve tree survival in Alaska. I sent a soil sample from a Kenai orchardist's ground to a lab in Pasco, and I found that some key elements were gravely deficient (e.g., boron and sulfur). I wonder how many Alaskan fruit trees have died, are struggling to survive, or have problems ripening their fruit because the soil is deficient in key nutrients? I suspect that soil-fertility management is one area that needs to be addressed more in Alaska and would be willing to write a few articles on this if you desire.

Things are slowing down now at work. All our fruit is harvested, some is being packed and sold, and much of the fall fertilizer (my last bottle of the growing season) has been spread on the orchard blocks that need it.

Feel free to share this letter with others in the APFG who might be interested. Hoping to hear from you.

Horticulturally,



Bob Purvis

Flower (507) 687-4765 (K)

(507) 457-8001 (L)

(507) 947-8205 (M)

## 1998 APPLE-TREE CENSUS

The last Alaskan apple-tree census was done in 1994, when 439 varieties and 1288 trees were reported by 10 respondents. Since then, several new growers have come onto the scene; many new varieties have been planted; and varieties that were represented by one or two trees have died. Also, only half of the ten largest orchardists in Alaska responded to the last census, so the results were partial at best.

The objectives of the 1998 census are to:

- Update the list of apple varieties that are currently being grown in Alaska, and those that are actually producing edible fruit.
- Compile a list of varieties that have failed.
- Count the number of apple trees.
- Determine the most successful and popular varieties.
- Determine the most successful rootstocks.
- Compile opinions on a number of fruit-growing questions.
- Find out how many "old" (1950's and older) trees are growing in Alaska.

Please take the time to fill out and return this form. If you are lucky enough to have more trees than will fit on a single page, copy the form, or just use a blank sheet. I'd welcome your response in whatever format, handwritten, typed, computer printout, diskette, or electronic. If you do have email and would like to submit your census form electronically, that will help speed up the tabulation at my end—especially if you have a very long list. If you use an IBM-compatible, the best way to send your response is in the body of an email message, rather than as an attachment. If you use a Macintosh, you can either send your response in the body of an email, or as an email attachment in a format that I can read (Word 5, or TEXT format).

Even if you have only one or two trees, your response is needed. Also, if you know of any large, producing trees in your neighborhood that belong to people who will not see this survey, please take the time to fill out at least the basic information. Examples would be the 8th & M mystery tree, the 15th St. mystery tree, the Koenigar transparent, etc. Guesses are better than no information at all. Also, even if you responded to the 1994 census and nothing much has changed in your orchard, please fill out the new census, which includes new questions.

# 1998 ALASKAN APPLE-TREE CENSUS

(Please respond by April 1, 1998. Send to Dwight Bradley, 22008 Voyles Blvd., Chugiak, AK 99567)

## PART 1, GENERAL INFORMATION

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Email address \_\_\_\_\_

## PART 2, INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR ORCHARD

Location of orchard \_\_\_\_\_ Number of producing trees \_\_\_\_\_ Total number of trees \_\_\_\_\_

Age of oldest tree \_\_\_\_\_ Do you have "moose-proof" fencing, and how high? \_\_\_\_\_

## PART 3, YOUR OPINION ON VARIOUS QUESTIONS

Favorite apple varieties (top 3) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Favorite rootstocks (or rootstock/interstem combinations, top 2) \_\_\_\_\_

The single apple variety and rootstock you would recommend to a beginner \_\_\_\_\_

Preferred grafting technique (whip & tongue, cleft, budding, other) \_\_\_\_\_

Best height above ground for grafting (inches) \_\_\_\_\_

## PART 4, APPLE ROOTSTOCKS YOU ARE GROWING

Variety	Number	Comments

**PART 5, APPLE VARIETIES YOU ARE GROWING**

Variety	Number of trees in ground (G) or pots (P)	Number of producing trees	Comments

**PART 6. LIST OTHER VARIETIES THAT YOU ARE GROWING AS TOPWORKED BRANCHES ON EXISTING TREES** (will count as varieties but not as separate trees).

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**PART 7. LIST APPLE VARIETIES THAT HAVE DIED. THIS ONE IS IMPORTANT!!**

Variety	Number

Variety	Number



Master Gardeners and the gardening public are invited to the statewide

# Alaska Master Gardeners Conference

*20 years of Master Gardening in Alaska*



February 27 & 28, 1998  
Westcoast International Inn  
Anchorage, Alaska



## Keynote Speaker:

*Lois Hole*, from Alberta, Canada

- Author of six books on **northern gardening**.
- Owner/operator of Hole's Greenhouse & Gardens, Ltd., one of Alberta's largest greenhouses and garden centers.
- Enthusiastic speaker with expertise in growing annuals, perennials, cut and dried flowers, and vegetables.

## Presentations:

- Bonsai • Worm Composting • Beautification Ideas • Botany
- Junior Garden Clubs • Hardy Roses • Hydroponics • Peonies
- Herbs • Common Garden Misconceptions • And more!

## Opportunities:

- Friday night banquet featuring *Lois Hole*.
- Garden Market—an opportunity to purchase garden related books, crafts, and other items.
- Preconference field trip to visit commercial greenhouses.

It is hoped this early conference notification will provide you with an opportunity to plan ahead. Registration materials will be mailed out later and will be available at Alaska Cooperative Extension. If making hotel reservations with Westcoast International Inn, please call 243-2233 and refer to booking #144 to receive the conference room rate. The Alaska Greenhouse & Nursery Conference will be held February 25 & 26 at the same location.

## Master Gardener

### contacts in Anchorage:

General Program—Judy Christianson, 344-6617

\*Please call Mary Shier, 345-1562, if you have Master Gardener photographs dating back since 1978.



# 17th Annual Statewide Alaska Greenhouse & Nursery Conference

Including  
**The Polar Grower Trade Show**



Dates: February 25 & 26, 1998  
Location: Westcoast International Inn  
Anchorage, Alaska

## Presentation Topics include:

- New Ideas for Greenhouse Flower Production
- Landscape Maintenance Techniques
- Marketing Ideas
- Hort Industry Needs
- Keys for a Successful Flower Maintenance Business
- Sitka Experiment Station (Results 100 years later)

## Other Events:

- Professional Training Opportunities
- Presentation of the AHA Mann Leiser Community Service Award
- **Tour of commercial greenhouse operations, and more...**

This early notification is intended to allow you an opportunity to plan ahead. Registration materials will be mailed out later and will also be available at Alaska Cooperative Extension (ACE) offices.

If you desire to make early hotel reservations with Westcoast International Inn, please call 243-2233 and refer to booking #144 to receive the conference room rate.

The Alaska Master Gardener Conference will be held February 27 & 28 at the same location.

Contact Julie Riley, Anchorage District ACE Horticulture Agent, (279-3582); or Wayne Vandire, State Horticulture Specialist, (279-6575) for more information.

Co-sponsored by:

