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Hello Fruit Growers!

Happy New Year! Winter Solstice is behind us and spring is on the way. I recognize that a sizable amount of cold and snow still lies ahead, but the uplifting feeling of gaining daylight can't be disputed. It won't be long and we'll feel the sun's warmth again as the Earth tilts towards summer.

During the winter, it is often a mystery as to what is going on under the snow. One thing you can be confident about is that voles are tunneling around at the snow/ground interface looking for food. Hopefully, you have your screens or tree wraps around your fruit trees so the voles are thwarted should they find your tree. But that is not the end of your duties. It is important to make sure that the snow doesn't top your screens or tree wraps. Voles also don't like to tunnel through compacted snow. So, if the snow gets too deep, take a hoe and compress or knock down the snow around your screens. Alternatively, stomp the snow down around anything you are trying to protect.

This is the month to think about grafting in the spring, and what scionwood you will need. Scionwood is wood collected from last year's growth that we use to graft new trees or varieties onto existing trees or rootstock. Club members are good about sharing scion wood, and often there is a bountiful collection of apple and basic pie-cherry scion wood available for free at the grafting workshop in April. However, if there is a particular variety that you are looking for and you know of a grower that can source it for you, you should contact that individual and ask them to set some aside for you. Scions can be harvested anytime while the trees are dormant, but most Alaskans harvest scion wood in March. Usually this is when we can get into our orchards without snow shoes to begin our winter pruning, and so it is convenient to collect scions at the same time. Click the link for more information about [collecting scionwood](#).

Now, if you are going off into adventuresome territory and are wanting to graft fruits and varieties not commonly grown in Alaska, then purchasing scions from the lower 48 is a good option. My first recommendation is Bob Purvis. Bob offers a wide selection of apple, cherry, apricot, plum and pear scions, and as a founding member of APFGA he is knowledgeable about Alaska's challenges. Click the link to [Purvis Nursery & Orchard](#) and you will find his listing of 2022 Scion Wood and descriptions of the varieties. The deadline for ordering from Bob is March 20, but you would be wise to place your order this month.

Another good source for scion wood is [Fedco Seeds](#). Located in Maine, they too have a focus on hardy, shorter season varieties. Once on the website, click on "Trees" and scroll down until you see "Scionwood." Fedco has a nice collection of heirloom and regional apple and pear varieties. Just remember that if something is going to ripen dependably in Alaska, the description should indicate that it ripens in Summer for Maine. Early Fall may be possible, but only in a really warm summer. Deadline for ordering from Fedco is February 18.

As you plan what you grow in your orchards, think about how you want to use the fruit and how much you need. Apples that don't store well will need to be eaten right away or put into sauce, cider, dried or canned. It was important to us to have apples that stored well in refrigeration. We just finished our Prairie Magic apples which kept wonderfully through December, and next we have a drawer of Simonet yet to eat. For Cherries, the question of how many quarts we would eat in a year determined the number of trees/varieties needed. For our household of two, 36 quarts in the freezer seems to meet our yearly needs. So, 4 or 5 bushes/trees seem to be adequate for both fresh eating and freezing, even in a poor year of production. Having an excess of course is nice to share with friends.

For those new to the club, during the Winter months (Nov. – Mar.), we hold a meeting or program on every second Thursday of the month. Consequently, our January program is coming up next week Thursday, January 13, at 7:00 pm. This month's Zoom presenter will be Jodie Anderson who will present on Soil Basics. Since 2018, Jodie has been the Director of the 920-acre UAF Matanuska Experiment Farm and Extension Center in Palmer. Her doctoral studies were in Soil Biochemistry at UAF where she studied fish waste as an option for composting and soil building. She has a varied background in agriculture and natural resources. Most recently, she served as program coordinator for the Alaska Division of Agriculture's Farm to School Program and worked with farmers, nonprofit organizations, and others to bring local food to schools and public food service distributors.

To attend Jodie's presentation on Soil Basics, just click the following [Zoom link](#) at 7:00 pm next Thursday (January 13). If needed, here is the full [Zoom Invitation](#). I encourage you to be thinking about what questions you may have about soil health, testing, and amendments. You can type and send your questions using the chat function during the meeting. APFGA Vice President, Mark Findlay will be hosting the program that evening, as I have a previous commitment with the Anchorage Symphony.

Also, a reminder that memberships are due for 2022. To avoid the annual hassle of renewing, please consider signing up for a lifetime membership. It is a bargain if you expect to grow fruit for more than ten years! For your convenience, you can renew online. Simply go to the [website](#) and click "Join." There you can select the membership you want, update any information, and pay easily with a credit card. If you wish to pay by check, simply go to the same place on the website and print off the membership form and mail it back with your check. Any questions, just email [Mark Findlay](#).

And finally, we will hold a Board Meeting on Thursday, January 27 at 7:00 pm. The meeting can be attended by clicking the following [Zoom link](#) at 7:00 pm the day of the meeting. Here are links for the past [minutes](#), proposed [agenda](#) and full [zoom invitation](#). Members are invited and always welcome to listen in on board meetings.

Best wishes for the New Year!

Mark Wolbers  
President, APFGA