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Alaska Pioneer Fruit Growers Association

Hello Fruit Growers!

We had a record apple pressing on September 26, with over 2,500 lbs of apples (122 buckets) ground and pressed into delicious juice. Our thanks to Barb Henjum and Jeff Brownlee for letting us take over their Brown Hen Farm for a second day. And a big thanks to Mark Findlay, Randy Arduser, and Doug & Carol Damberg who helped the entire day from 10 am until 6:30 pm. We also appreciate the many members who pitched in for part of the day. Your help was essential to making the day a success for our members.

Now that the growing season has closed, everyone's attention has turned towards getting ready for winter. Here are some things that you might consider doing before the snow sets in.

Mulch your strawberries. Although some varieties of June bearers are relatively hardy, you can ensure their survival by covering them with mulch. If you grow them in raised beds or you have more tender varieties, I recommend mulching with straw.

Clean up your raspberry patch by removing the old second-year canes. I run the old canes through the wood chipper and mulch them back onto the beds. If you grow your raspberries on wires, be sure to tie up next year's fruiting canes to prevent them from breaking under the weight of snow. Cut first year purple raspberry canes back to 4 feet and prune any laterals to 6-9 inches.

Check your half-high blueberries for new shoots. Some varieties like North Blue send out new shoots that often grow out parallel to the ground. Take those shoot and thread them through the old growth so that they are growing upward. Do this now, because they will no longer be bendable next season. Do what you can to encourage upward growth.

If you grow Romance series bush cherries, (Romeo, Juliet, Cupid, etc) tie up or stake young floppy growth. Snow can bend the shoots down when they are young, and you want to encourage strong, upright growth. Try to avoid letting low shoots grow out horizontally, since the weight of eventual fruit will bend those branches to the ground. If you provide support, the one-year growth will harden in the direction you want.

Stake young apple trees and be sure to have rodent screening or tree wraps around the lower 2 feet of trunk. I recommend putting an 8 ft stake in next to newly planted apple trees to later support them during the winter. You untie them in the spring/summer, but leave the stake there to provide support if needed when they start fruiting, and to tie them for winter again in following years. My apple trees had stakes in place for the first 6-8 years.

Remove the leaves and dropped fruit of any trees that showed signs of fungal infection. Bag them and put it in the trash. Do not compost them or leave them under the tree as they will be a source of infection the next year.

This is also a good time to get wood chips to mulch around your trees. You can get them from any tree service for usually just a delivery fee or sometimes even free. I like to build my soil by spreading birch and cottonwood leaves, broadcasting some limestone on the leaves, and then topping with wood chips. Don't worry if you get some spruce in your chips. It won't affect your soil and they decay quickly. Always keep any mulch a couple of inches away from the trunk of the tree.

Finally, review your barriers to animals. Is your fencing secure and adequate to protect your trees from moose or possibly bears? If rabbits are in your area, do you have screening to keep them out? Do you have protection from voles and mice around your tree trunks? Removing food sources like bird and animal feed can help make your yard less inviting to bears, mice and voles, and animal repellants like [Plantskydd](#) have been shown to provide some deterrence to moose, rabbits and voles.

Now, on to business. We will have our annual membership meeting on Zoom on Thursday, November 11, 2021 at 7:00 pm. Please mark your calendars to join us. We need to elect a slate of four board members, hear the annual report, consider some [changes to the bylaws](#) (click link to view), and hopefully have time to hold a roundtable discussion of what we all learned this year. If you have an interest in serving on the Board of Directors please [email me](#). I will send a meeting reminder, along with a proposed agenda, and Zoom link early in November.

We will also have a [Board of Directors meeting](#) on Thursday, October 21, 2021 at 7:00 pm on Zoom. Click the link for the [full invitation](#). The following are links to the [proposed agenda](#), and [board minutes](#) from April 4, 2021. As always, you (members) are welcome to join the meeting and listen to the discussion.

Last, I had hoped that we might move back to blended in-person/Zoom meetings this year. However, due to low vaccination rates and the resulting surge of COVID cases, the BP Energy Center has cancelled all events through the end of the year. They will reassess the situation in December about whether to allow meetings again starting in January. Regardless, please don't hesitate to [email me](#) anytime should you have any questions, concerns or suggestions.

All the best,

Mark Wolbers
President, APFGA