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Alaska Pioneer Fruit Growers Association

Hello Fruit Growers!

Our annual Membership Meeting is coming up on the second Thursday of November (November 10, at 7:00 pm). Please put this on your calendar to join us on [Zoom](#). We will need to elect a slate of board members and it will be interesting to discuss the past growing season. What follows are links to the [proposed agenda](#), the [minutes](#) from our last membership meeting, and full [Zoom invitation](#) if needed.

Hopefully, everyone is ready for the onset of winter. To say our season ended wet would be an understatement. But remember how dry it was during the first half of the summer? Do you wish there was a free lunch? Well, if you said yes to both of those things, then you are the kind of person Jodie Anderson (director UAF Mat-Su Experimental Farm) is trying to reach! She is offering a free lunch to anyone who registers by November 7, to participate in person in the National Drought Mitigation Center's free workshop on Farming, Water and Drought in Alaska. Jodie is convinced you will leave this free workshop having learned things you never knew. The topics include: Alaska climate trends, U.S. Drought Monitor and drought designation process, agricultural impacts of drought, decision making during a drought, and resources for adaptation. Click the [National Drought Mitigation Workshop](#) link for more information.

In Southcentral, drought seems like a distant memory. However, the clouds and rain did keep hard frosts at bay through the first two weeks of October. This effectively lengthened our growing season three weeks over what we were dealt last year. Yes, these were not weeks with high growing degree day (GDD) amounts, but it did allow us to crop some later varieties of apples. Even the second flush of fruit on the lingonberries ("Koralle") in the photo above were mostly ripe.

Speaking of late apple varieties, many thanks to Mark & Sharmin Oathout and their crew for hosting the late apple/fruit tasting at their Mid-Valley Greenhouse in Wasilla (photo below). There was a great selection of apples and everyone had fun sampling the fruit. Also, thank you to APFGA Vice President, Mark Findlay who has posted the results of both [early and late tastings](#) on our website under the "Research" tab.



These tastings, although fun, are very useful for understanding what varieties perform well under various summer growing conditions. I made extensive use of the tasting results when I selected the varieties I wanted to graft and grow in our orchard. A good mix of solid performers in the worst summers with some aspirational selections for better years is a good strategy.

The GDD totals and ground temperature readings for the remainder of the growing season in our East Anchorage orchard were as follows.

10.2.22 2654 GDD/42° 1453 GDD/50° Soil 52° F/6" 52.1°F/12"
10.9.22 2723 GDD/42° 1474 GDD/50° Soil 51.2°F/6" 52.4°F/12"
10.16.22 2727 GDD/42° 1477 GDD/50° Soil 43.8°F/6" 45° F/12"

The 2022 growing season was effectively over on October 13, here in East Anchorage with hard freeze events down to 20° F. Total GDD/42° for 2022 was 2725. We had approximately 300 more GDD/42° than we had in 2021.

We are currently in the third year of a La Niña weather cycle. This means that like the previous two winters, our weather is likely to be punctuated by extremes. Last year, after an early hard freeze in mid-September, temperatures in the fall persisted in the 30-40° F range until mid-November when they plunged to -15° F following our first big snow. Local strawberry grower/seller and APFGA member Tim Pritchett has observed that people often lose strawberry plants by mulching them too early. In a fall like last year, and it seems this year, the strawberries can continue to try to grow under mulch and expend their stored reserves. Better to wait to mulch if you are so inclined.

University of Minnesota Extension officer Anni Klodd agrees. In her article ["When to Mulch Strawberries this Fall"](#) she recommends waiting "until the soil temperature has remained at or below 40 degrees F at 4 inches depth for at least 3 consecutive days." As you can see above, our soil temperatures are not quite there yet.

In South Central Alaska, many hardy June bearers do not require any mulching provided there is snow cover. Growing in our orchard is the variety Cavendish. It never gets mulched and seems to do just fine. For the strawberries in our raised bed grow-boxes, I am waiting to see if we will have good snow cover before the first severe cold below 10° F. If we do not get snow, then I will cover those plants with straw before the first deep freeze is predicted. If you don't want to wait and gamble with the forecasts, then perhaps at least wait until the surface of the ground stays consistently frozen and is not thawing out during the day any more before covering with mulch.

For raspberries, I recommend waiting to remove the second-year canes (floricanes) until the leaves have dropped or the ground is frozen hard. Generally, I just leave them and remove them in the spring. Like many plants, the raspberries will move resources to their roots for winter so I just leave the canes in place. If you grow raspberries on wires, then be sure to tie this year's canes (primocanes) to your wires to prevent breakage from snow/wind. I was reminded to do this when I saw our canes bent over with an earlier light snow.

If you grow purple raspberries, and properly headed the primocanes when they had reached 4 feet in height, then you should head back any laterals to 6-9". This will give you stronger laterals next year, and help prevent them breaking off under snow-load. For your red raspberries, I recommend that you wait until April to head back this year's primocanes to stimulate laterals. Depending on the winter, there can be tip die-back on the end of the canes. Consequently, they are a bit more protected if left alone at this point.

There are a lot of ways to grow and manage raspberries (See ["Growing Raspberries in Your Home Garden"](#)). What I am sharing with you is what I do to maximize our production. We grow raspberries in 2 X 8 raised bed boxes, with only 12 fruiting canes (foricanes) per box. Our box of Killarney red produced around 30 lbs and the box of Royalty purple produced 22 lbs. Based on square footage of land used, we are producing over a pound of fruit per square foot. So, I want you to know that a huge rambling patch isn't required if your yard space is limited.

Now that the leaves are off the blueberry plants, I recommend that you remove any remaining fruit which should be easily visible. Blueberries rarely finish cropping completely in Alaska, and there are always small berries on the plants that didn't have time to mature. These should be removed to prevent disease the next season. Any new shoots should be put into an upright position. Varieties like Northblue often produce new shoots that grow sideways low to the ground. They will be more productive if threaded upward through the canopy of the bush now before the stems harden.

If you had fungal problems (scab or leaf spot) with any of your fruit trees this summer, then you should rake, bag, and dispose of any remaining leaves or fruit on or under that tree. Fungal infections can be initiated the next season from over-wintered infected leaves and fruit. You would know if you had a leaf-spot fungal problem because your tree would have developed spotted or yellow leaves that would have dropped prematurely in August. You can break the infection cycle with good fall hygiene and a preventative spray of liquid copper in May when you start to see green tips on the branches. Fungal infections can only be prevented, not cured.

If you sent out soil samples in August to be tested, then good for you! If your results indicated that you could use some lime, then go ahead and spread lime on top of the fallen leaves in your orchard. The late Michael Phillips writes that this can disrupt the production of fungal spore sacs on any infected leaves and interrupt fungal scab reproduction. In addition, putting leaves around your fruit trees can ramp up the soil biology. If you are putting down wood chips, then lay down leaves first, apply lime and then cover with chips to hold everything in place. Using a mower to chop the leaves will help them decompose more quickly and once the trees are fully dormant it is even OK to spread compost if snow arrival is delayed. For most other soil amendments you should wait until spring to apply. Just remember that no compost, leaves or wood chips should be within 6" of the tree trunk. Generally, this won't happen anyway if you have your rodent screens in place.

On December 8, at 7:00 pm, we will have UAF soil scientist Bob Vanvelthuizen to be a Winter Series Zoom presenter to give an overview of Alaska soils, testing, interpretation, and to answer any soil health questions that you may have. More information on this program will be coming later.

On January 12, Bob Thaden, owner and wine maker for Tongue River Winery will be our Zoom presenter on the subject of making fruit wines. He has produced gold medal wines using cherries, haskaps, and black currants among other fruits. If you have any questions about winemaking that you want to be sure are addressed, please [email them to me](#), and I will pass them on to Bob.

I look forward to seeing you at our annual November Membership Meeting on November 10, at 7:00 pm on Zoom.

All the best,

Mark Wolbers
President, APFGA

