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Hello Fruit Growers!

This has been a beautiful, if wet fall in the Anchorage area. The foliage has been exceptionally colorful and the temperatures mild. I feel very lucky that mother nature cooperated and decided to hold off on the rain for each of our apple pressing events. We ground and pressed around 80 5-gallon buckets of apples the weekend of September 27. The new press really worked well, producing 1.5 gallons of juice per bucket of apples!

We finished picking the remaining cherries and apples this past weekend. Even after 8 weeks of raspberries, we are still getting a handful every few days (today's picking in photo above), along with a few day neutral strawberries (seascape) that are growing under plastic. So far, our lowest temperature in East Anchorage was 30 degrees on Tuesday morning. Consequently, the berries have not shut down and are continuing to produce. This will continue until we have some clear nights and temperatures drop into the 20's.

This past season I followed WSU small fruit expert Dr. Lisa DeVetter's recommendations concerning fertilizing the blueberries. I applied three applications of fish emulsion at a rate of 2 Tbsp/gal per 10 feet of row. The applications began at bloom with subsequent applications a month apart. The plants responded very well. Our production was at least 4 times greater than we have harvested in past years, and there was much more new growth. Our blueberries are primarily comprised of the varieties Northblue, with Chippewa, Polaris and 2 recently planted Northcountry plants.

While pressing apples, one of our members mentioned to me that they had heard that one should not remove the second-year raspberry canes in the fall. A little investigation revealed that the better practice is indeed to wait on removing the dying floricanes. Research conducted at Cornell University indicates that these canes send carbohydrates to the crown and roots well into early winter, helping the plants survive dormancy. On a similar track, one should wait until the spring to head back any canes or laterals on this year's growth (primocanes) since pruning can stimulate growth which is the opposite of what you want as things are heading into dormancy.

The apple trees should be dropping their leaves. If you have any issues with fungus such as apple scab or leaf spot, then be sure to rake up and bag all dropped fruit and leaves under those trees. Do not compost this material and put it in the trash. Trees that have fungal infections will re-infect themselves the next season from spores on the dropped fruit and leaves. It is recommended that you follow up with a copper fungicide spray in the spring when the trees are at green tip.

This is also your last chance to put rodent screens around your trees, or to put on tree guards or tree wrap to protect your apple trees from mice and voles. If you are preparing a space for fruit trees next season, hopefully you have done a soil test. This is a good time to add soil amendments in preparation for planting next season. Some nutrients like phosphorous (P) and potassium (K) are not very mobile, so it is best to mix them into the soil prior to planting. Remember to modify all of the soil in the area if possible, and not just the hole you plant the tree in. The tree's feeder roots will soon extend well past the expanding drip line as the tree grows.

If you have young trees, you should consider staking them for winter. Jeff Lowenfels correctly pointed out in last Friday's ADN gardening column, that staking is detrimental to a tree's root development. However, snow that results in a bent over young apple tree isn't great either. My thought is to stake a young tree during the winter and then untie it in the spring. Regardless of whether you stake your trees or not during the winter, one needs to be watchful after every snow to make sure your trees are doing OK. I am often most concerned with the first snow, since leaves may not be off the trees yet. After that, I am simply monitoring for snow/ice load on the branches and will periodically go out and knock the snow off the branches.

I am happy to report that APFGA has a very healthy membership of around 220 members despite the pandemic! Unfortunately, our country seems incapable of getting the COVID-19 virus under control. The BP Energy Center where we hold our winter meetings has cancelled all users for the fall, and it is unlikely that we will be having any in-person meetings in the near future. The APFGA Board of Directors will have a Zoom meeting on Thursday, October 22, from 4-6 pm to discuss how we proceed for this next year. Click the link for a proposed [agenda](#). If you would like to listen in to the discussion, just [email me](#) and I will send you the link to the meeting. As always please feel free to email me any suggestions, thoughts, questions or concerns about your fruit, or the club.

Best wishes,

Mark Wolbers
President, APFGA