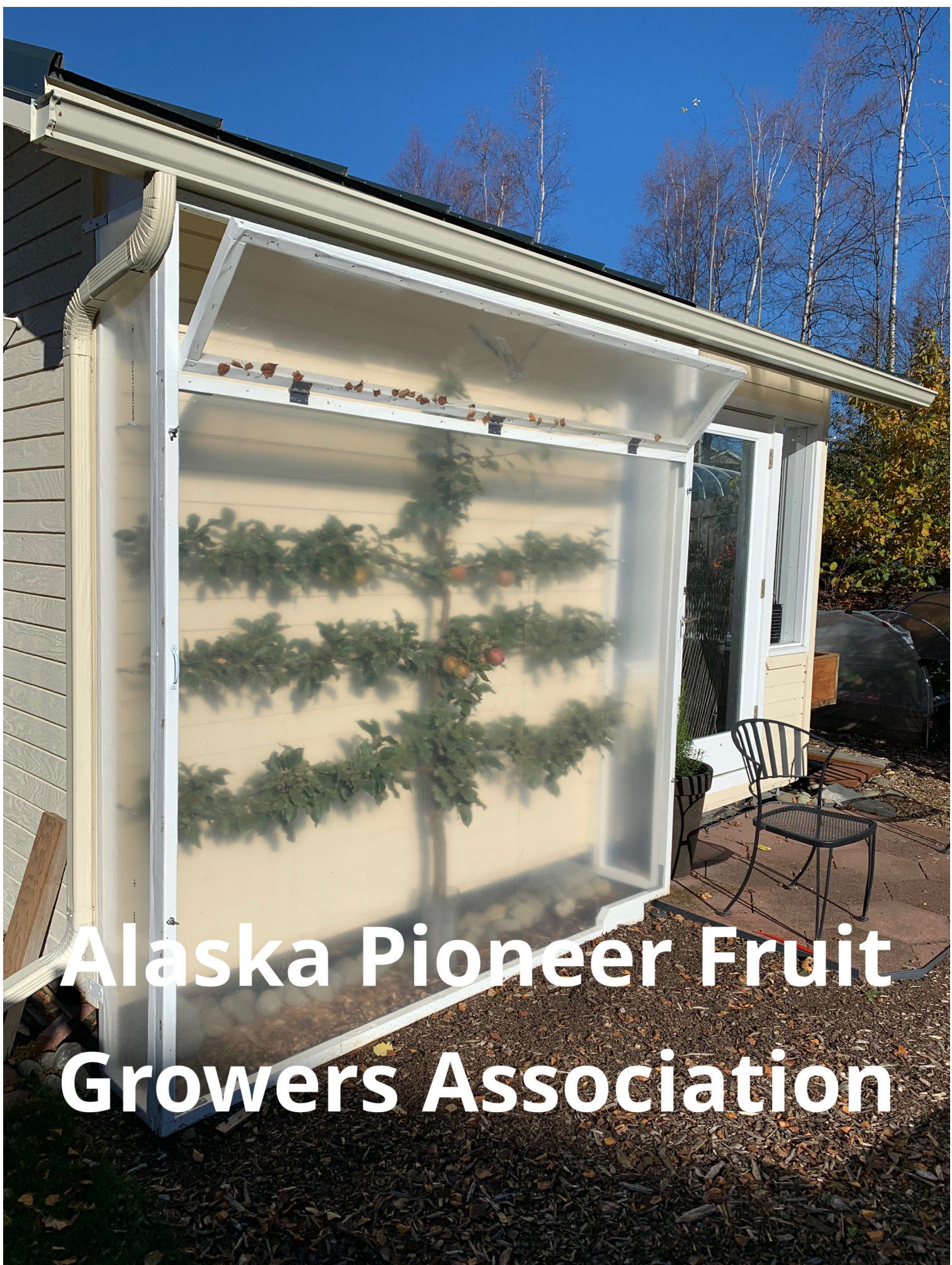


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Alaska Pioneer Fruit Growers Association

Hello Fruit Growers!

A reminder that we will have our annual membership meeting on Thursday, November 10 at 7:00 pm on Zoom. We are happy to have expanded our membership to around 325 members. However, according to our bylaws, we now need 33 members (10%) to “zoom in” in order to conduct any business!

I promise that the business side of the meeting will be short. Just a couple of reports, a vote on a slate of board members, and then we will be on to something more interesting. So, please plan to join us to help keep the wheels moving on our club. To [join the meeting](#), just click the link at 7:00 pm on Thursday. If you missed them in the last newsletter, here are the links for the past [minutes](#), proposed [agenda](#), and full [Zoom invitation](#) if needed.

We had our first morning at 0° F Sunday morning in East Anchorage. Winter is here, but so far it has been a good arrival. We have had weeks of weather that didn’t exceed freezing during the day to help the trees and bushes gain enhanced hardiness. And, we have had a couple of snows to put some insulation on the ground. I shoveled a bit more onto our strawberry boxes and garlic patches for good measure.

Many of you have seen the espaliered [Sweet 16 apple](#) on the South side of our shed. I grafted, grew and trained the tree not realizing how late this variety is for our season. The harsh reality of this situation didn’t become apparent until the tree fruited for the first-time last summer in 2021. There I was, with lots of really unripe apples! So, what to do? It had taken years to train this tree and it seemed a shame to dig it up and start over.

After some thought, I decided to design and build an inexpensive greenhouse cover for the tree (photo above) to see if it was possible to capture enough heat units to ripen the apples. I built the greenhouse cover by ripping six 2 x 4s into 2 x 2s for the frames. I bought an [automatic opener](#) (a wax cylinder that expands when the temperature reaches 70°) for the top vent. The frame is covered with UV resistant greenhouse plastic sheeting that I already had. In all, it cost just under \$100 in materials.

The greenhouse cover was installed right after bloom, pollination and fruit thinning. I placed a [blue-tooth temperature monitor](#) inside in a shaded spot. Temperatures would quickly clime to 84° when the sun would come out. But as you know, the second half of this past growing season did not have hardly any sun. On cloudy days it would only be a couple of degrees warmer than the ambient temperature. So, it was not at all certain if this experiment would actually bear fruit, if you know what I mean.

On the day before our first hard freeze in October, APFGA board member Doug Damberg helped me to take off and stow the cover for the winter. We picked the apples, and cut one to sample. It was green and had not received much sun exposure. Yet, the seeds were still dark (photo below) but the brix was only 9. The texture was crisp but the flavor, although good, was not as vibrant as I know it can be. However, last week I cut a Sweet 16 that had more color from sun exposure. It was crisp and juicy, with a more pronounced anis flavor, and a higher brix of 12.



So, the take-away from this adventure is that yes, you can indeed crop a later variety with an inexpensive greenhouse cover on the side of a building. It provided the equivalent of an extra month to the growing season. However, it is important to prune or remove leaves for sun exposure on the fruit. Consequently, I will modify my design next spring to make it easier to have access on a more regular basis. I may eventually replace the tree with a variety that doesn’t need a cover, but for now, I am enjoying some Sweet 16 apples!

And now, for some housekeeping. If any of you purchased and installed an [Onset MX2305](#) air temperature logger, please [email me](#). Even if you did not capture the entire season, I would be interested in viewing your temperature data. Just download your data and email it to me as a HOBO file.

Finally, on Thursday, November 17, at 7:00 pm we will have a Board of Directors meeting on Zoom. Members are welcome to attend. Our main business is to decide who will undertake the officer positions and head up the various activities of the club. Here are links to [join the meeting](#), the proposed [agenda](#), previous [minutes](#), and full [Zoom invitation](#).

Hope to see you for our membership meeting on Thursdasy!

All the best,

Mark Wolbers
President, APFGA