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Hello Fruit Growers!

Winter now has a firm hold on our plants. Dormant, they wait out the short winter days and bear the cold, waiting for the signals of spring to wake up. We, on the other hand, are out of our gardens and orchards and snuggly in our homes. We use this time to plan for the season ahead while trying to make sense of the last season we just experienced. Far from idle dreaming, the clock is running. Rootstock has already been requested and orders for scionwood from outside (out of state) will be due soon in January. 'Tis the season for contemplating what might be, and for planning how to make it happen.

I enjoy looking at catalogs for ideas, varieties, and information. Two of my favorites for tree fruit are [Fedco](#) (Maine), and [St. Lawrence Nursery](#) (Upstate NY). Both specialize in cold hardy plants, although for Alaska, cold hardiness is just one requirement. The other is that fruit ripen during our relatively short season. Consequently, in these catalogs, I am always looking at ripening times. Those ripening times appropriate to Alaska are usually listed as “summer”.

I'm not the first Alaskan to peruse these tomes to find fruits and varieties to experiment with. Member Deb Blaylock (in Palmer) has been experimenting with elderberries. She started in 2015 with two selections of European Black Elderberry (*Sambucus nigra*), Samdal and Samyl. They produced harvestable fruit in the summers of 2018 and 2019. But in the summers before that, the fruit did not ripen by the end of the season. The last two winters have been hard on them and there has been some mortality and they have not flowered or fruited. Some seedlings have persisted, but last summer she went ahead and ordered four new cultivars of American Black Elderberry (*Sambucus canadensis*), Nova, Johns, Adams and York. These plants are from St. Lawrence Nursery and are said to be hardier than the European varieties. The experiment continues . . .

It seems that we are often motivated to grow fruit based upon our memories. My longing for the apples and cherries of my childhood in Michigan was not going to be sated by mere supermarket apples. Likewise, my experiments with black raspberries are probably an attempt to relive the joy of finding those little black gifts of nature along the various tree rows of my youth. Although my trial of Jewel black raspberries showed they were not hardy enough for our climate, I have been researching and thinking about my next attempts.

Three excellent berry sources are [Nourse Farms](#), [Indiana Berry & Plant Co.](#), and [Krieger's Nursery](#). I have ordered strawberries and raspberries from Indiana Berry in the past and have been pleased with their quality. Krieger's has recently caught my attention as they have some interesting hardy plants. They carry three Zone 3 Black Raspberries (New Logan, Bristol, & Cumberland), a Zone 4 Black Berry (Darrow) along with the American Elderberries mentioned above.

Some of our members have a desire for nuts similar to my hunger for black raspberries. The [Upper Midwest Hazelnut Development Initiative](#), a collaboration between the Universities of Wisconsin and Minnesota, is working to develop hybrid cultivars that could fill the need for cold-climate growers. Although they haven't worked out the propagation of the hybrids selected so far, seedlings of some selections are available. Since they are seedlings, the plants will be variable, so you might want to buy a number of them to increase the odds that something might survive and work in Alaska. Experiments like these are a bit of a gamble, but if you want to roll the dice, the seedlings can be sourced from St. Lawrence Nursery.



Last month I was contacted by member Jozef(Joey) Slowik asking if anyone in the club had experienced an infestation of Black Currant midge. Joey is the Integrated Pest Management (IPM) technician at the Palmer Extension Office. I requested a photo (above) of what the damage looks like and a few more details. Joey wrote: “The maggots are just white maggots about 2-3mm in length. They inhabit the terminal leaves of new growth. So, they reduce the overall growth of the bush, but fruit can still be set even with the damage. We don't know what varieties they occur on, or the extent of the infestation, but they seem to be found only on Black Currant.” He thinks this may be *Dasineura tetensi*, which is the Black Currant Midge. But this pest has never been documented in North America. Joey continued writing that “the maggots and damage does look like *D. tetensi*, and we've got a DNA barcode from some maggots, but failed at rearing them to adulthood to verify the ID. And there is no reference DNA barcode to confirm the ID either. But we've got a midge expert at the Smithsonian waiting in the wings if we can get some specimens to him for ID, which is good. It could be a new species, gall midges are poorly studied. But we would like to document where and on what it occurs.”

Of course, I laughed when I saw the photo, because while not knowing what was attacking them, our Swedish Black Currant has been infested the past couple of years! Like in the picture, the new shoots would just curl up and eventually whither. This summer, I sprayed and hand-picked the damaged shoots. I promised Joey that I would put the word out to the membership. If any of you have this problem with your Black Currants, please click the link and [email Joey](#) to let him know! Hopefully, once properly identified, we will have some management protocols to recommend for affected growers.

Mark your calendar for Thursday, December 9, at 7:00 pm when our December Program guest speaker will be [Kathleen Wiederholt](#). Kathy is the Fruit Project Manager at the North Dakota State University (NDSU) Carrington Research Extension Center (CREC). She will be presenting on the research they do at the CREC on cold hardy fruit cultivars. Her work includes many points of interest to Alaskans, including haskaps, currants, and other small fruits as well as some more unusual crops such as hazelnuts and saskatoons.

Kathy is an exceptional educator and presenter. I encourage you to watch a couple of her videos. The first is a brief presentation on [Growing Haskaps in North Dakota](#). And the second is a [2020 Orchard Overview](#). I enjoy the way she takes time to explain what she is observing with their plants. In any case, you don't want to miss her presentation next Thursday, December 9. I have attached the complete [Zoom Invitation](#), or you can just click the following [Zoom link](#) at 7:00 pm next Thursday. As always, please be patient as it can take a few minutes to admit everyone to the meeting.

Finally, it is December and the Holidays are approaching. Please consider giving the gift of a APFGA Membership to those who share your interest in growing, or eating great fruit. You can give the gift of a family membership by going to the [APFGA website](#) and clicking “Join.” While you are there, go ahead and renew your own membership for 2022! It's only \$16 dollars and there are no supply-chain issues. :)

All the best,

Mark Wolbers
President, APFGA