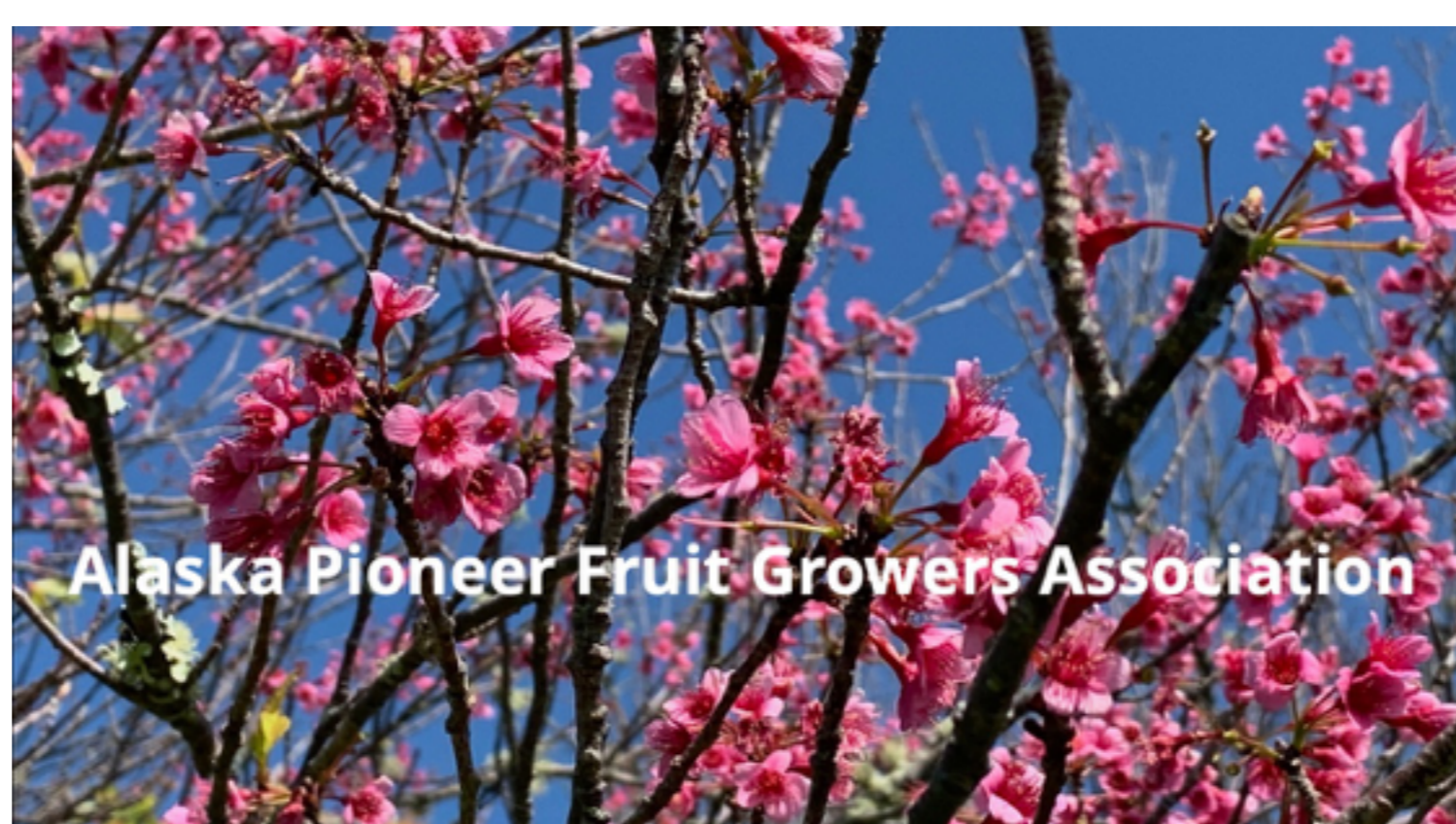


[View this email in your browser](#)



Hello Fruit Growers!

In the beginning of January, my wife Miok and I had a small break from winter with a visit to the Big Island. The ornamental cherries (photo above) were just beginning to flower at 2,500 ft elevation. We like to stay in the rural areas around Kumuela (Waimea) and were rejuvenated by visits to the local farmer's markets. There, we found fresh papaya and strawberries, along with abundant produce that included our favorite purple sweet potatoes and even local sweet corn. It was a little taste of summer amidst the winter.

It is always fun to talk with the growers and beekeepers in Hawaii. They are as amazed to hear what we grow in our climate as we are with what they grow. Sometimes, to everyone's surprise, the wind from Hawaii blows into Alaska as it did January 21. I came out of symphony rehearsal that evening at 10 pm and was met by a 50-degree chinook wind! Four days of weather into the forties melted half of the snowpack in the Anchorage area. Luckily, most plants have not met their chill-hour requirements and will stay safely in dormancy.

Our friends farther North in Fairbanks are dealing with the aftermath of the freak rain storm earlier last month. At the time the snow was fairly deep, and with the rain it now has a hard crust on the surface. As that snow compacts over time and eventually sinks, it can easily break any covered low branches that are unable to resist the descending crust. It is a reminder that the weather is a challenging variable for anyone who works with Mother Nature!

Despite last season's wet, cold and abrupt end, we are still eating apples from our garage refrigerator. The Simonet apples are nearing the endpoint of their storage potential, but are still crisp and flavorful. Surprisingly, our crop of unripe Sweet 16 apples that needed at least 3 more weeks of summer when picked, have gradually ripened in the refrigerator. The seeds turned from white to black, the licorice overtones have emerged and the texture is still crisp. Because they didn't get fully ripe before being picked, they didn't develop their full sugar potential, and only have a brix of between 10-11. But they are still a very edible apple, especially for February.

Storage is just one of the many hurdles that stand in the way of extended home use or larger scale fruit agriculture. We lack the packing houses and storage facilities found in the lower 48. If one were trying to grow an apple variety on a commercial scale, the lack of controlled atmosphere (CA) storage means that the crop would have a limited shelf-life and could only be made available to buyers during harvest season. A possible solution for small fruit growing regions like Alaska may be [Janny Boxes](#). These storage containers help hold fruit for an extended time in normal refrigeration and create a storage environment similar to CA storage through the use of membrane gas filters. One storage box holds 18 bushels of apples and is designed to be moved with a forklift, so unfortunately it won't fit in our Samsung refrigerator!

I have also been thinking about grafting and the scion wood that I will want in the spring. In emailing Bob Purvis with some questions about pear varieties, he asked about what rootstock I would be using. When I informed him that the club had ordered Pyrus Ussuriensis (Harbin Pear) rootstock, he recommended that I graft it with Summercrisp this year to use as an inter-stem between the rootstock and the varieties I actually would like to grow. Apparently, pears grafted directly to Ussuriensis can suffer from black-end disorder which he says is based on the same principle as bottom end-rot on tomatoes which is a failure to translocate calcium to the fruits for various reasons. Summercrisp has Ussuriensis in its lineage and therefore makes a good bridge between the rootstock and subsequent grafts.

In light of this information, it would be helpful to know who is growing Summercrisp pear, and whether your tree is capable of providing scion wood for those fellow members who may be grafting Harbin pear. Please [email me](#) if you would be willing to provide Summercrisp scion wood for the April grafting workshop and I will pass that information on. Alternatively, if you are ordering scion wood from outside, you might consider requesting some Summercrisp if you are grafting pear rootstock.

Yael Hickok who manages the Boyer orchard and greenhouse has informed me that they have officially formed a non-profit corporation titled, "Friends of Boyer's Orchard." They have formed an inaugural board and are registered with the State. In addition, they have submitted the papers to become a 501 c-3 with the IRS. They are currently getting quotes for liability insurance so they can start scheduling classes and volunteer events. The hope is to lease the property for a couple of years and eventually garner the resources through grants and donations to purchase the property out-right. The mission statement isn't finalized but basically the purpose is to manage the orchard for the benefit of the community, to learn how to grow food sustainability, and to serve as a source of local organic produce.

I am pleased to announce that the guest speaker for our next winter Zoom program on Thursday, February 10, at 7:00 pm will be Katrina Mendrey. Katrina is the Orchard Program Manager for Montana State University's [Western Agricultural Research Center](#) (WARC). Her presentation is titled, "Growing Backyard Fruit Trees from Establishment to Production." Click the Zoom link at 7:00 pm to [join the presentation](#).

Katrina's growers face a number of challenges that are similar to what we face in Alaska. At the higher altitudes they have a shorter season length and also deal with issues of hardiness, weather, and critters. She is an engaging speaker and I am confident you will enjoy and learn from her presentation. If needed, here is the full [Zoom invitation](#).

Your Board of Directors is busy planning for the spring. We are expecting to have grafting, pruning and top-working workshops. We are tentatively planning on a pruning workshop in the Boyers Greenhouse on Saturday, March 26, and a grafting workshop on Saturday, April 23. The grafting workshop will be where you will pick-up rootstock, share scion wood, and receive grafting instruction if desired. More details and information will be shared as we get closer to the events.

There will also be a Board of Directors (BoD) meeting on Thursday, February 24 at 7:00 pm. Members are invited to listen to the BoD meetings, and you can join these zoom meeting by clicking the [BoD Zoom link](#). Here are also the links for the [proposed agenda](#), [past minutes](#), and [full Zoom invite](#).

Finally, a friendly reminder that if you have not yet renewed your membership, this will be the last newsletter that you receive. Yearly dues are only \$16, or you can avoid the hassle of renewing each year by signing up for a lifetime membership. When you consider the newsletters, winter programs, workshops, access to rootstock and scion wood, orchard tours, apple pressings, fruit tastings, and fellowship with your fellow growers, it's quite a bargain. You can renew with a credit card on the [APFGA website](#), or print off the membership form and mail it in.

Best wishes,

Mark Wolbers  
President, APFGA

