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Hello Fruit Growers!

If you are privileged to have some land, winter is the perfect time to make plans to add to what you are growing. Don't let the number of choices be overwhelming. You might consider gooseberries, currants, blueberries, lingonberries, haskaps, strawberries, raspberries, Kiwis or one of the tree fruits, just to name a few. Your decision will naturally lead you to the question, which of the many varieties should I try? This is the beauty of belonging to a club of growers who can help guide your choice. No matter the fruit or variety, chances are someone has experience trying to grow it. Just ask.

As a planning step for choosing what plants and varieties you want to grow, I always encourage people to list what they want to do with their fruit. Do they just want fresh eats during the season, or do they want to juice, sauce, can, dry or freeze what they grow. Next, consider capacity in regards to how much one should plant. What do you think you will consume in a year, and how much refrigerator, freezer and canning space do you have? When fall arrives, our upright freezer and garage refrigerator are maxed out. Those little trees and plants that we put in ten years ago now produce more than we eat. It is a blessing and a joy however to share that bounty with our friends or contribute to the local food bank.

Next, measure your space and plan your layout. Search "landscape planning" or "landscape design" for ideas if aesthetics are important. Our yard is only about a quarter acre, the size of an average city lot. Yet, last year our young orchard produced over 250 lbs of apples, and 140 lbs of cherries in addition to all of the berry fruits and vegetables. Think of the potential if more people planted fruit trees and bushes that would be there for the next owners! As you plan, consider removing the grass and putting mulch around your trees and bushes. Grass really doesn't add value to your home like fruit trees and bushes can. Those will add beauty and value with their blossoms, fruit and foliage. In any case, wouldn't you rather grow than mow?

If you are going to order any plants, this is the time to do it. Personally, we have decided to make a change to our strawberry patch. We have been growing two boxes of berries under hoops and plastic. One is planted with a mid-season June bearer called Cavendish that we love. The other is planted with Seascape, a day neutral strawberry. The day neutral strawberries are not hardy, and I don't want to deal with them as annuals each year. They fruit at the end of summer when everything else is fruiting anyways, which isn't particularly useful. Consequently, that box is going to be replanted with an early June bearer (Ac Wendy). We like the flavor of June bearers better, and this should give us strawberries a week or so before the Cavendish come on. More importantly, the plants should do fine in our winters. So, we have placed our order with [Indiana Berry Co.](#) for a bundle of 25 plants which is perfect for one 4' X 8' box at 1 foot staggered spacing.

This is also a good time to order supplies and equipment that you might need when the season starts. Pruning is one of the first tasks of the spring and those of you with larger orchards or with increasing age might consider battery operated pruners. These range from the entry-level [Scotts Cordless Rechargeable Power Pruner](#) with Extension Pole for \$75 with a 3/4" branch cutting capacity, to professional power pruner lines by Felco or Infaco in the \$2,000 range.

The idea behind powered pruners is that you can ditch the loppers and do your pruning with just a small hand-held cutter. For professional workers, a good powered pruner allows them to prune and move through the orchard quickly with less fatigue or chance of repetitive motion injuries. If I had more trees or was a bit more decrepit, I would consider the KOHAM Professional Cordless Electric [Pruning Shears](#) with a 1.2 Inch cutting diameter for \$288. Along with having a more robust cutting size and faster action than the Scotts, this Amazon Choice selection is the only powered pruner in its price category to have a safety feature that stops the cutter if the blade contacts your skin. For larger orchards a tool like this might be a real work and time saver.

Ilona Farr is planning to purchase her own apple grinder similar to what the club owns. She asked me to reach out and see if anyone else was thinking of purchasing a grinder to see if they wanted to share freight shipping charges. If you are interested call or text Ilona at 748-3264.

Please mark your calendars for our next meeting program on Thursday, February 11 at 7:00 pm. We are pleased to have Steve Masterman, a talented grower from Fairbanks, give a presentation titled: "From Paper to Plants - 1,300 Plants on 2.5 acres: Site Layout, Clearing, Soil Prep, Planning for the Varieties, Economics, Harvest Thoughts, and Horticulture." Click the link to join the [presentation](#) on the prescribed day at 7:00 pm. The complete Zoom invitation can be found [here](#).

If you have missed any of this winter's presentations, they have been recorded and can be viewed on our [website](#). Just click on the "Research" tab and scroll down to "Meeting Program Slides and Video." While you are there, please take the opportunity to renew your membership if you have not already done so. Just click the tab "Join" and scroll down to renew with a credit card. You will no longer receive APFGA emails after March 1 if you have not renewed.

I hope you can join us on February 11 for what should be an interesting presentation by Steve Masterman.

All the best,

Mark Wolbers
President, APFGA