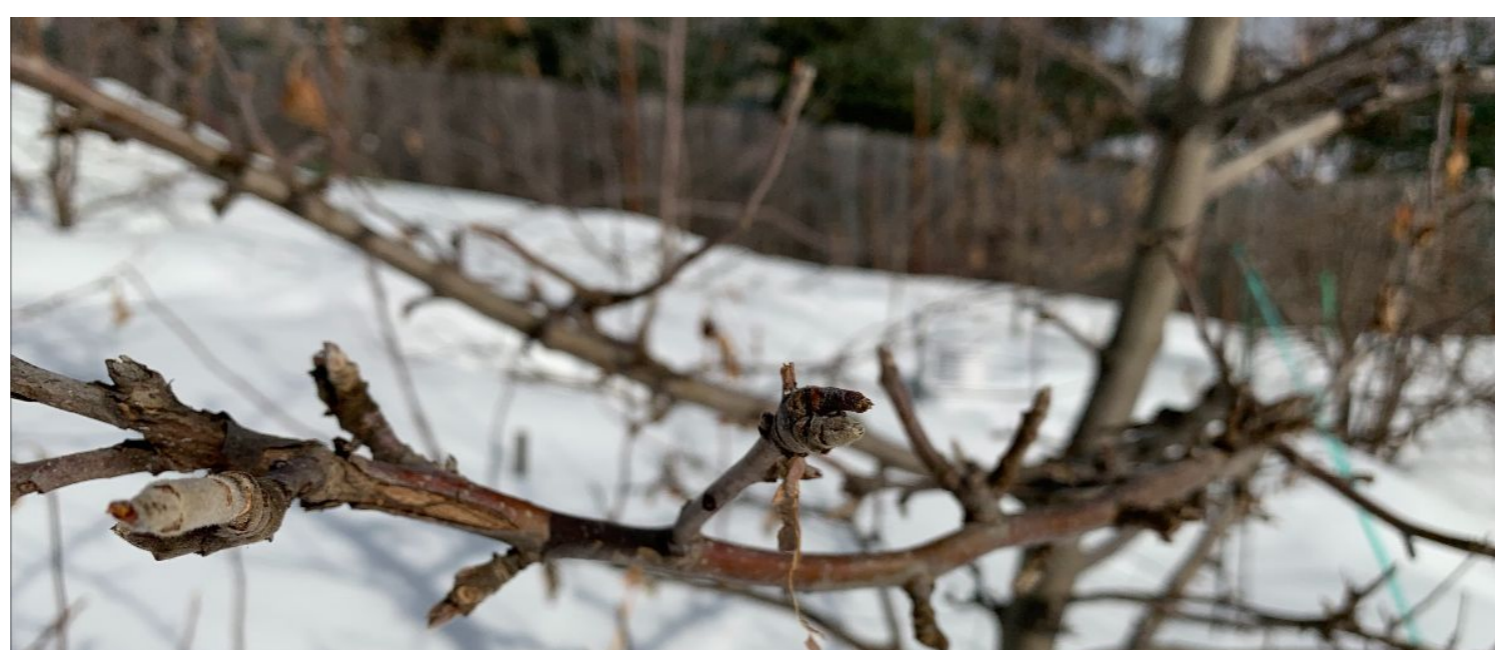


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## Alaska Pioneer Fruit Growers Association

Hello Fruit Growers!

Judging by the Simonet buds above, and the asphalt visible on our driveway, it would appear that the sun is now winning over the snow. Anchorage was in the running to break the 60-day record for consecutive days below freezing. I'm not complaining. A consistently cold winter with a good snow cover is generally better for our plants. But, now that things are warming a bit, you should probably harvest [scion wood](#) if you want some for grafting this spring and have not already done so.

Climate change causes the jet stream to behave differently than it would normally. This leads to erratic weather. Much of the lower 48 experienced extreme and unusual winter events, whereas in Kyoto, Japan, the cherry blossoms were in full bloom on March 26, the earliest since they began keeping records in the year 812, around 1200 years ago (!).

In other news, Ned Rozzell confirmed in his Sunday, March 21 column in the Anchorage Daily News what a member in South Anchorage had told me this past fall. Contrary to the accepted knowledge, Voles are actually good climbers! Our member had installed ½" wire mesh as a lower level of fencing around his growing area, and witnessed a vole climbing it like it was a ladder. I was dubious of this super-vole sighting, but alas it appears to be true. In the woods, I have witnessed their tracks in the snow leading to trees with nowhere to go, but up.

Now, don't despair about the screening around your fruit trees. It indeed helps to protect your tree because the voles are mostly moving through tunnels under the snow at the ground level. Despite our efforts, sometimes the critters do find a tasty apple tree. If they girdle the tree by chewing the bark all the way around, then the tree is doomed unless you are successful with bridge grafts. If you find very recent, fresh damage where they only gnawed some of the bark, then you might try covering the wound with some clear silicone caulk. Dan Elliot mentioned this to me a couple of years ago, and I have done this with success. The silicone kept the newly damaged area protected and from drying out, and eventually over the next few years, new bark gradually formed.

The University of Idaho has a couple of good videos that may be of interest. Go to the Sandpoint, ID Organic Agriculture Center, [Heritage Orchard Conference Recordings](#). Scroll down and you will see a video titled "Intro to Grafting" that has good basic grafting information and some awesome bridge grafts. There is also a video on pruning titled, "Restoration Pruning." Although it deals with pruning old heritage trees, it explains some basic principles that you may find useful.

Speaking of pruning, generally we do our spring pruning sometime between now and when the trees wake up in May. It is best for the tree if we prune after winter is mostly done, but before the trees come out of dormancy. The cold gives the trees a better chance at healing without fungal infections.

Pruning and tree training are things that I always seem to be learning more about. Terry Thisius recently recommended the book "[Training and Pruning Apple Trees](#)" by C. G. Forshey. It is an excellent and concise text that is free online. For more information on pruning you might also check out some of the videos on the [APFGA website](#) under the "Research" tab – "Educational Videos & Publications." The more I learn, the more I am grateful that apple trees are so forgiving of their caretakers!

Although we are all looking forward to what we see and do with our trees above ground, I have been thinking about what is under our fruit trees. I recently read three books that gave me much to consider. The first was Jeff Lowenfels' "Teaming with Microbes," an excellent introduction to soil biology. Then I read "Mycelium Running" by Paul Stamets, a book you will appreciate even if you are not a Star Trek Discovery fan! This book provides insights into the importance, uses, and relationships of mycelium in the soil. Next, I read "The Holistic Orchard" by Michael Phillips. This book suggests approaches to improve orchard health that are worth considering. All three books have got me thinking more broadly about the total environment and biome that our fruiting plants inhabit.

University of Minnesota recently released a [report on bird management tactics](#). If anyone decides to try the [Avion Control](#) this season, please let me know how it performs. In other news, UMN also has shared information about [invasive jumping worms](#). Just one more reason to be careful of imported nursery plants. It is always recommended to quarantine and check the plants for invasive weeds and pests before moving them into your garden.

Fred Deiser (907)355-3448 wanted me to ask if any members had experience with grafting grapes. If that is in your toolbox, please give Fred a call. For those of you looking for Evans, or Romance Cherry bushes, the owner of Eagle River Mile 5.2 Greenhouse said that those will be available this spring. If interested, you might check what he has left over from last year towards the end of April. This year's plant shipment from Canada is scheduled to arrive in the first week of May.

I have also been getting questions about when we will be meeting in person again. This will depend upon Alaska achieving sufficient immunization to make it safe to gather again. (So, get your shots!) The board will meet in May to assess the infection rate and guidelines for gatherings with the possibility of holding orchard tours this summer.

Finally, our rootstock orders will be arriving in the next couple of weeks. You will receive a notice when your order is ready to pick up.

Best wishes,

Mark Wolbers  
President, APFGA