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Hello Fruit Growers!

In times like these, I wistfully smile and tip my hat to Voltaire for his story *Candide*. At one point in the story Candide is asked to explain optimism. He replies “that it’s a mania for insisting all is well when things are going badly.” Finally, after many unfortunate trials, his conclusion is that we should simply tend our gardens.

To that end, the weather has been beautiful (!), and the trees are beginning to leaf out. At our house we have been eating the emerging shoots of the watermelon berries (above), chives, and even pulled out a ginseng root that we had started a few years ago. Yum. If anyone wants a watermelon berry plant, just [email me](#). They are beautiful plants for a semi-shady spot in the garden and they will become much larger than you find them in the wild. The robins do a good job of distributing the seeds, so extra plants are never a problem.

My recent chore in the garden has been to replace the rodent screens (below) around all of our fruit trees as they were not high enough to stay above snowfall. Earlier, I had pruned limbs that were too low to allow for 2-foot high screens around the trunks. I cut the ½” mesh screen to 30” lengths that should allow for 20 years of growth, and secured them with plastic coated twist ties. Then I moved the main tree identification tag from the tree to the screen. This way, I don’t need to worry about checking the tags every year to see if they are becoming tight around the limbs.



To those of you who purchased rootstock, hopefully your grafts are healing and budding out. My grafted apples healed and had started to grow out. Consequently, I put them in pots last weekend and now they are taking off. Generally, I graft two buds onto the rootstock. Yesterday, many had shoots that were already 4-6” long, so I pinched off the weaker of the two shoots to establish what will be the central leader of the young tree. This way, all of the plant energy is going to grow one shoot.

Now is the time to begin grafting onto existing trees if you want. The bark on the apples is slipping, and I have been practicing bark grafts and experimenting with some other grafting techniques. As always, it will be interesting to see what works. Today, I began working on the cherries since the warm weather appears to be sticking around. However, the bark did not easily slip on all of the trees, so I would recommend waiting another week to top-work cherries.

In Alaska, our spring and early summer are generally sunny and dry. Your grass is probably still brown unless you have been watering. The same applies to your fruit trees and plants. Our soils are clay based, and often appear damp, but the moisture is locked up and not accessible by your plants. Unimproved clay soils need to have up to 40% more water to have the same water potential for your plants as sandy or loamy soil. In general, you should be providing 1-2” of water every week for your trees and plants. This is utilized best by your plants if you apply ½” every other day or so.

Finally, due to social distancing we will not be engaging in our usual summer activities. However, I will try to keep sending you periodic tips and reminders about taking care of your fruit. We don’t advertise APFGA and really depend on word of mouth to spread the message that we are a helpful group to belong to. With that in mind, please feel free to forward this email to a friend, and encourage them to go on our [web-site](#) and join us.

As always, please email me should you have any questions. If I can’t help you, I’ll do my best to help you connect with someone who can.

Stay well,

Mark Wolbers  
President, APFGA