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Hello Fruit Growers!

I had a good laugh the other day when I saw the comment that this is the time of year not only for hardening off plants, but for hardening off gardeners! Based on the feedback from my body, it would seem I am not fully hardened off yet.

My wife has been picking the watermelon berry shoots (photo above) and finding clever ways to incorporate them into our meals. They are kind of like an early season “asparagus.” If you would like a plant, [just ask](#) as the birds are generous with seeding them here and there in the garden.

The last couple of days have been spent top-working our apple trees. I don’t have any more room for trees, so if I want to try a different variety then grafting it to an existing tree is about the only option. The cherries will get worked on when the weather warms up a bit more.

It has been interesting watching the plants come out of dormancy. Last year’s grafted sweet cherries and apricots are taking their sweet time budding out. I thought they might be dead, but they are just now showing signs of life. A Gold cherry I grafted last year on Evans rootstock is the exception and is being very precocious and vigorous.

Haskaps are coming into bloom and thankfully the bumblebees haven’t minded the cool and windy conditions. This time of year, the bumblebees and yellow jackets that we see are overwintered queens. I have been making wasp traps with the hope that I can capture the queen yellow jackets before they establish nests. In the spring, the yellow jackets are looking for sources of protein, so that is how I am baiting the traps. I find that a plastic soda or water bottle with the top cut off and inverted works pretty well.

On the topic of pollinators, there are a number of studies being done on Native Bees this summer. If you are interested in joining one of them as a community scientist, you can learn more [here](#). In addition, the Pollinator Education program at The Ohio State University is presenting a series of webinars for community scientists. The Bee Short Course for Community Scientists will have talks from experts on bee botany, biology, collection, identification, monitoring, photography, and more! Webinars will be held on the third Friday of each month from May to November 2021, and all webinars will be recorded for later viewing online. Learn more and register at [The Ohio State University Bee Lab website](#). As if that were not enough, the Alaska Botanical Garden will be participating in an Alaska-wide bee monitoring effort, known as the Alaska Bee Atlas. ABG will serve as a training site for agency biologists and community scientists to learn the survey protocol." Contact [Patrick Ryan](#) for more info.

Fred Deiser recently called me and asked if I would put out the word that they are looking to expand the grape study. He has more Valiant and King of the North grape plants available free for trial. You need to have a good spot to grow a grape outside (like against the South side of a building with a basement) or a high tunnel or greenhouse. If you are interested, give Fred a call at (907) 355-3448. Also, if you are looking for a rhubarb plant, Jack Mosby (907)333-4442 has some to give away.

I remember when haskaps were a new fruit that the club first imported for our members to try probably 12 or 13 years ago. My wife and I purchased a Svetlana and Cinderella that we moved with us to our current house. It is a testament to how popular haskaps have become to see them now in the box stores. Home Depot even had Aurora, Tundra and Honey Bee. I stopped to see what was available at Mile 5.2 Greenhouse in Eagle River and they were carrying Tundra, Borealis, Blizzard, Polar Jewel and Indigo Gem. It would appear that haskaps are no longer a “niche” plant. I noticed at the Greenhouse that they also had “Smokey” Saskatoon, but was told that their shipment of romance cherries had been delayed until sometime in June or July.

The Board of Directors met last week and wanted me to seek your interest in the board position held by Gary Masog who is out for a long recuperation from illness. Gary handled finances and plant orders for the club. We are looking for someone to join the board who would be willing to handle part or some of those duties. The time commitment is not great, and we hope a new board member learning the ropes will become a future asset to the organization. Please [email me](#) if you are interested, or have any questions. I will be making an appointment no later than June 1.

Finally, the Board discussed the resumption of summer orchard tours. It light of the recent CDC guidelines and levels of vaccination, the board believes it is OK to resume outdoor events. If you have yet to get vaccinated, please consider doing so as it makes it less likely that you could unknowingly infect someone else.

For our first tour of the summer, we invite you to join us for a “blossom tour” on Sunday, June 6 at 2:00 pm, at the Brown Hen Farm in Chugiak. I will email a reminder and directions when the time is near.

All the best,

Mark Wolbers
President, APFGA

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