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Alaska Pioneer Fruit Growers Association

Hello Fruit Growers!

I like to think that the true start of the Alaska growing season is that day when one first gets the wheel-barrow out. If that is the case, then our season in Southcentral Alaska started on April 26 with a beautiful sunny day in the upper 50's. There were still some patches of snow, but that didn't get in the way of mixing up some soil and potting our newly grafted rootstock.

APFGA distributed over 1,600 rootstock at the grafting workshop on April 23. Our site was late to open, which made the workshop a bit more chaotic than it needed to be. But, everyone seemed to have fun buying rootstock, picking out scion wood, and getting some primers on grafting.

Dan Moore of Fire Apple Orchard in Big Lake mentioned last week that they had some surplus *Prunus americana* (plum), and some *Malus baccata* (apple) rootstock for sale. If you are still looking for some rootstock, you can call Dan at (907) 373-6317.

At the grafting workshop, we showed you how to graft young whips. This month we will hold two workshops to demonstrate how to graft onto existing trees (called top-working). I will lead the first workshop in Anchorage on Saturday, May 14, at 2:00 pm at [Bob & Gail French's house](#) (685 Birch St) in Government Hill. Dan Elliot will lead the second workshop out in the valley on May 15, at 2:00 pm at the [Mid-Valley Greenhouse](#) (1346 Hyer Rd, Wasilla).

Last year, I potted up 18 apple seedlings that sprouted under my Red Splendor ornamental crab. Red Splendor is a selection of *baccata*, and I was curious to see how well they take grafts and grow as a possible rootstock. All of the seedlings survived winter above ground and I grafted 13 of the most vigorous. They had achieved 1/4" diameter a few inches above the soil level and it was perfect for trying a grafting technique showed to me by Paul Lariviere where you connect the rootstock and scion with a small piece of plastic tubing. The seedlings were grafted with 7 different varieties of apples. Just like with *baccata* rootstock there was a mix of seedlings with red wood(5) and white wood(8). Wood color in apples is often correlated to the flower and/or fruit color.

After grafting them, I removed them from their half-gallon milk cartons and repotted them in two-gallon pots. When I initially potted the seedlings, I had soaked them in water with Wildroot Organic Mighty Mycorrhizae Inoculant Concentrate. I was impressed by the amount of root growth in one year (photo above) but, I can't say conclusively that this was due to the inoculant since I did no controls with untreated plants. In any case, I was happy to have grown the seedlings outside to a graftable size in just one short season.

You too, can try growing your own apple rootstock if you have seeds from a zone 2-3 crabapple like *Baccata*, *Dolgo*, *Radiant*, *Renetka*, *Royalty*, or *Selkirk*. In addition to *Baccata*, *Dolgo* and *Selkirk* are particularly hardy.

Hopefully, you have completed most of your tree pruning. Just a reminder not to forget about your small fruits. Top your red raspberry floricanes (2nd year canes) to whatever height you prefer to encourage lateral branching (hmmm, just like heading cuts on trees!). You should also consider pruning your gooseberries, currants, kiwis and possibly blueberries. If your blueberries have been growing for a number of years, shoots larger than one inch are good targets for renewal. Any pruning on Haskaps (honeyberries) should strictly be done with thinning cuts. The fruit of haskaps really benefits from pruning to increase airflow, light penetration, and to encourage more upright growth. The Cornell [Guide to Growing Fruit at Home](#) is a handy resource for pruning and care of the more commonly grown fruits. Understanding your plant's growth and fruiting habits can be helpful in making good pruning decisions.



I was pruning one of our apples and found European fruit scale insects on one part of the tree. (photo above). The large oyster shapes are the remains of last year's female adults who each produced over a thousand tiny, almost invisible babies called crawlers. Once they hatch, they crawl to the leaves to feed until the end of the season when they move back to the branch and begin the cycle of forming a shell and reproducing. You can see the tiny maroon-color dots on the twig which are this year's adults. If left alone, they will grow and develop a similar large shell and hatch another batch of crawlers starting in the beginning of July.

May is an opportunity to address these sap-suckers and any other over-wintering soft-body insect pests like mites, aphids and their eggs. The traditional way of doing this is by applying a dormant oil spray. Modern formulations of horticultural oil are labeled as "all-season" oils. Both Monterey and Bonide are brands of commonly available horticultural oils for the home grower and can be found on Amazon if not locally. Apply dormant oil sprays prior to bloom. Oil should not be applied until night time temperatures will remain above freezing for 72 hours, and the weather forecast is rain-free. Oil is a contact treatment, consequently you need to cover the entire plant surface thoroughly.

Fungal problems are not common in Alaska, but should you have trees that develop spotted leaves that drop prematurely, apple scab, mildew or other fungal issues, then you should also apply a copper spray. This is sold as "Liquid Copper Fungicide." It is important that you thoroughly pick up and dispose of any remaining fallen leaves, or over-wintered fruit, as they can harbor fungal spores that can reinfect your trees. For maximum benefit on apples it is recommended that you apply copper when the emerging green leaf (this stage is called green-tip) is between 1/4" and 1/2". Spray on a day that is rain free for at least 24 hours and thoroughly cover the entire tree. Spraying after 1/2" green tip can result in some photo toxicity and fruit russetting. For cherries, you should spray before green tissue is present to prevent any photo toxicity. Copper spray is water soluble, so heavy rains can wash the spray off of the tree.

Haskaps will be in blossom soon, so now is the time to check or renew your supply of *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt). Once the Haskaps have finished blooming, that is your cue to spray Bt to prevent fruit damage by leaf-rollers. Bt is a soil bacterium that paralyzes the gut of leaf-rollers and they essentially starve to death. The shelf life of Bt, even under cool storage conditions, is at most three years, but dependably, two years. I recommend that you buy fresh product every third year. Take a sharpie and mark the purchase year on your bottle so you know when to replace it. When you are spraying your Haskaps, go ahead and spray your saskatoons, fruit trees and any other plants that you have noticed having problems with leaf-rollers. Bt is considered bee safe and an organic treatment.

During the summer, we periodically tour member orchards and gardens to look at how others are growing fruit. It is a time to share ideas and methods, to ask questions, and see some beautiful properties. If you are willing to host an orchard tour please text Board Director Ilona Farr at (907)748-3264. She will be organizing the orchard tours this summer.

Finally, your APFGA Board of Directors (BoD) will be meeting by Zoom on Thursday, May 12, 2022, at 7:00 pm. Members are invited and welcome to sit in on the meeting. You can watch us doing business by clicking the [meeting link](#), or you can click the following link for the [full invitation](#). In addition, here are the links to the proposed [agenda](#), and April 14 BoD meeting [minutes](#).

All the best,

Mark Wolbers
President, APFGA

