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Hello fruit Growers!

Alaska often surprises me when it decides to turn the corner from one season to another. I am by no means complaining, but I do marvel how within three weeks we go from break-up to essentially summer.

With temperatures now above freezing at night, I went out and sprayed our fruit trees and bushes with a horticultural oil (sometimes referred to as a dormant oil). We had trouble with scale insects last year, so this year I am being proactive. The oil should smother any over-wintered insects. If you decide you want to apply a dormant oil spray, I recommend that you apply it before your plants leaf out.

The buds on the trees are beginning to swell, and soon they will be pushing green tips. If you want to add grafts to any of your existing trees (called “top-working” or “frame-working”) we are approaching an optimum time (green tips). Grafting is a great way to add another variety to an existing tree. It is especially useful if space is limited, or you have a tree that produces more apples of a particular variety than you care to have. I like to add a limb or two of what I call aspirational apples – those that might not become fully ripe in a cool wet summer. This way I am not overly committed to something by having a whole tree of a late season variety. The photo above is of my “Zestar” graft.

To engage in top-working or frame-working, you will need scion wood. I have a fairly wide variety of apple scion wood available to share with members. Let me know what you are looking for, or if I can help with some suggestions. At this point, unless you tell me otherwise, I will assume you want the scion for grafting on mature trees. Click the link to [email me](#) if you need scion wood.

Normally, we would have a top-working workshop with our resident expert, Dan Elliot. This year however, you will be on your own. Thankfully, there are plenty of YouTube videos on grafting. But in the end, whether you are cleft grafting, bark grafting, or simply doing a splice, the fundamental principal is always the same: get the cambium layers of the tree and the scion to meet. Seal and bind the graft with parafilm tape and wax.

I personally like to paint and seal my grafted scion with Doc Farwell’s Grafting Seal. This is somewhat like a stretchy latex paint that helps to keep the scion from drying out before the graft heals. To put the odds even a bit more in my favor, I also put a little plastic bag over the graft to help keep the environment humid and warm. The little airbags that you find in your Amazon boxes are ideal. Just cut one end, spray a little water into the bag, slip it over the graft, and secure it to the branch with a twist tie.

Once the trees flower, our attention turns to pollinators. We often only think of honey bees, but native bumble and mason bees are good pollinators too. Board member Val Glooschenko has put together some information and photos on providing homes for mason bees. To read her article just click the link: [Mason Bees](#).

Last year, we hosted an orchard tour, and a number of people expressed interest in some tall strange plants we were growing. The plants were Burdock. My wife Miok, who is the real gardener and landscape architect of the family, wanted me to let you know that she saved seeds and would be happy to share them. Click the link and send me an [email](#) if you are interested in trying some Burdock Seeds.

As always, don’t hesitate to shoot me an email with a question, or better yet, ask the membership for ideas and suggestions by posting a question on the “Forum.” This is found on our [webpage](#) under the “Members” tab.

Best wishes and stay healthy!

Mark Wolbers
APFGA President

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