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Hello Fruit Growers!

In the three weeks since the last newsletter, we have gone from pink/white bud on the apples and cherries, to petal fall and fruit set. Some unusually warm temperatures over the last two weeks of May and the beginning of June really pushed things along. By the time the Memorial Day weekend arrived, just about all of the trees and bushes were in full bloom at the same time. I wonder if this blossom abundance overwhelmed the pollinators? Fruit set on the apples was adequate, but less than last year, and the jury is still out on the cherries.

Our first orchard tour happened Memorial Day weekend with visits to the Farr, Deiser and Hook orchards in the Valley. We thank our hosts for opening their property and sharing their knowledge and interest in growing fruit. The photo above shows Fred Deiser (center - blue shirt) explaining some of the finer points about how he and Dawn manage their fruit trees and bushes.

The hot temperatures over the last couple of weeks are pushing our Growing Degree Day totals up nicely. We are currently one week to 10 days ahead of last year at this time. Here are the totals for our East Anchorage orchard for the past three weeks:

May 29	430 GDD/42°	186 GDD/50°	Soil 57°F/6"	54°F/12"
June 5	610 GDD/42°	296 GDD/50°	Soil 60°F/6"	57°F/12"
June 12	750 GDD/42°	403 GDD/50°	Soil 59.5°F/6"	57.5°F/12"

Apples as of June 12, range in size from initial set in the late bloomers to 15-17 mm in early blooming varieties like Golden Uralian and Prairie Magic. Likewise tart cherries range in size from fruit set to 9 mm. The June bearing strawberries are setting fruit and our Arctic Kiwis and Killarney red raspberries have begun to blossom

Sawfly larvae are beginning to appear on the currants and gooseberries. I recommend using Spinosad if you have a number of plants to treat. If you only have one plant, you can of course hand pick the larvae, or treat them with insecticidal soap or horticultural oil when they are young. However, those are contact sprays, and may need to be repeated as subsequent generations appear. For a deeper dive into controlling sawfly larvae please click the link to see the [University of Minnesota Extension Publication](#) on the subject.

On June 4, I scouted my first Black Currant Gall Midge larvae of the year on our Swedish Black currant. They like to feed on the emerging shoot tips. If you find that your new leaf tips are curled up and deformed, pick one and carefully open it up, and you will find a tiny 1mm white larva inside. I picked the infested shoots and sprayed the plant with all-season horticultural oil hoping to smother any remaining eggs. The larvae won't kill your plant or interfere with the fruit but they do damage the plant's new growth.

Haskaps (aka Honeyberries) have set fruit and are starting to color (Cinderella is already mostly blue). Unless you have planted haskaps as bird food, you will need a plan to cover your plants with netting. The robins will start hitting the fruit as soon as the skins turn blue, even though the fruit is still weeks from being fully ripe. In preparation for creating a netting plan, it is helpful to know the growth habit of the variety purchased. Haskap bushes are small from the store, but over time get to be pretty large. Varieties like Tundra and Aurora have a spreading growth habit and should be planted 8' apart, and get around 5' high. Whereas Berry Blue will occupy a somewhat narrower space but will want to go 8' high. Of course, you can plant closer together to create a hedge or you can prune the bushes as we do to fit the confines of our netted area.



Blueberries were in full bloom already 12 days ago and the flowers are beginning to drop! The picture above is of our Northblue blueberries. This year I noticed fewer native pollinators about. Although the honey bees have spread the word and are now showing up in good numbers, I really prefer the bumblebees as blueberry pollinators. In any case, if you grow blueberries, now is the time to give them a shot in the arm. I recommend using Fish Emulsion at a rate of 2-3 Tbsp/gal of water to cover 24 square feet. Do this now and again in 4 weeks. Your berries will be larger and the plants more vigorous.

You have probably noticed that every cluster of apple blossoms on your trees has now set fruit. Consequently, it is time to thin the crop of the regular apples. Your objective is to first reduce every cluster of 5 or 6 apples down to the best one. Usually, the largest of the apples is the center king blossom which opens first. Once you have each cluster reduced to one apple, then you need to determine how many apples the branch or tree should have. On trees that are just beginning to bear, keep the fruit set small, and towards the center of the tree. Look at the size of the branch and think about how much weight it can handle. Keeping the fruit set small allows the tree to put more energy into growing. Generally, I do not let any fruit set the first year a tree blooms. On mature trees, reduce the fruit to one apple every 6-9 inches. I like to favor fruit that has good sun exposure.

In the past I have removed a gazillion little apples with a pair of pruners or shears. This year I am using [Thinning Scissors by ARS](#) which are designed expressly for this purpose, and I love them. They are ergonomic, comfortable, perfect for the task, and a joy to use. Note: these would make a great gift for the person who does the apple thinning in your family!

For regular apples, thinning really helps to increase the fruit size. Although it is not necessary on most crab-apples, I do thin apples on our Whitney crab since it has a tendency for biennial bearing. The combination of dormant pruning and reducing the fruit set post bloom helps to keep apple trees from over-bearing one year and then taking a year off the next.

Miok and I grow a number of native plants including watermelon berries ([Streptopus amplexifolius](#)). Although they are small in the woods, they become large, beautiful ornate plants in a garden situation and grow well in shaded locations. Often, we put a tomato cage over them to help support them. The young shoots in the spring are edible and the berries can be easily juiced with a food mill equipped with a small berry screen to remove the seeds. The berries make an interesting liquor which is always fun to share. Birds, including our chickens love to eat the berries. Consequently, there is never a shortage of new plants spread by our feathered companions. So, if you plan to be in East Anchorage and would like a plant or two, just [email me](#). I would be happy to give you some.

Lastly, member Martha Farris wanted me to let the membership know that a friend of hers will be selling a house in East Anchorage with 8 mature cherry trees, 15 mature apple trees, as well as currants and raspberries. If you know someone who might be interested in growing fruit who is looking for a house, please [email Martha](#) for more information.

All the best,

Mark Wolbers
President, APFGA