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Hello Fruit Growers!

This is the fun time of year when the plants really start growing. I was excited to see that I finally had a William's Pride, an apple that doesn't like to graft on Baccata rootstock, survive a second winter. I had pruned the whip back to 30 inches and left the top bud to become the new leader. I then rubbed out the next two buds that would have sharp crotch angles anyway, and selected what would become my first scaffold of branches. The new leader was growing nicely until a bird tried to land on it! There is always more than one challenge, but that is what keeps it interesting.

The blueberries and lingonberries are in full bloom. I had mentioned earlier that I was experimenting with fertilizing them with fish emulsion. I am giving them three treatments each one month apart. So far, the plants seem to be responding favorably. The new growth on the lingonberries is quite impressive. The one pictured above is "Ida," one of four commercial varieties I am growing, in addition to our native lingonberries.

The strawberries are also coming into bloom. Most of us grow June bearers and I am already impatient for July to come! (In Alaska, we should call them "July bearers") We grow a wonderful, super hardy July (June) bearer called Cavendish. Ten months is a long time to wait for a decent strawberry!

If you planted day-neutral strawberries this spring, then it is recommended that you pick off the flowers during June. Berry expert Dr. Lisa DeVetter from WSU says "flowering is a very energy-intensive process, so I would recommend removing the first flush of flowers for 6 weeks in a new day-neutral planting. This will allow energy the plant has stored to go into root and shoot development, which will support flowering and fruiting later in the season. If the planting is overwintered, then the root and shoot system should already be established and flower removal is not necessary."

I managed to overwinter some Seascape day-neutral strawberries. They are not hardy, and even under 12 inches of straw the survival rate was only 60 percent. But nevertheless, I was happy to hear I could leave the first flowers on the plants! Although the taste and quality of the day neutral is not as good as a June bearer, they are still better than what you get in the store because you pick them when they are ripe. They do extend the strawberry season and will continue to fruit until the weather stops cooperating.



A member sent me a photo of a currant with a mystery insect infestation. It was European Fruit Scale (shown on an apple in photo above). This was an unwanted discovery that I shared with everyone last year. To my knowledge scale insects have now been found in West Anchorage, Downtown, and East Anchorage. Consequently, I think it is safe to assume at this point that it could be in your yard right now. This is why I highly recommended a dormant or horticultural oil spray right before leaf-out in May. You should check your fruiting plants and any fruit related ornamentals for scale insects. With the prevalence of Prunus Padus (bird cherry), there will be no shortage of host plants. Click the link if you wish to read my [suggestions and response](#) to our stricken member.

Speaking of Prunus Padus, I had a fun day last Saturday grafting Juliet cherry and yellow plum to various Prunus Padus and Prunus Virginiana trees that our members had. Fairbanks fruit enthusiast Vic Johanson sent me a great photo of plums growing on a Prunus Virginiana. Who knows, if this experiment bears fruit (ouch!) maybe some of these invasive trees can be converted to something slightly more useful.

Lastly, I know that I constantly remind members to water. For optimal growth the plants should have 1 – 1.5 inches of water each week which translates into a half inch or so every two or three days. With that amount of watering, one cannot over-state the importance of good gear. Life is too short to put up with a hose that is not flexible while cold water runs through it, or a poor watering nozzle.

I received a bit of teasing when I shipped a hose reel, piggy-backed on a shipment of musical instruments and supplies bound for my friends at the Horn Doctor. But I smile every day when I turn that beautiful American crafted, all-metal, Eley hose reel mounted on the side of my house. (I know, I'm grunting like Tim Allen and power tools!) On Sunday morning, I fired up a new Gilmour impulse sprinkler and life was good. This bad-boy actually had more range than I needed, and the 5-foot tripod got the water up and over my orchard without repurposing my step ladder! These are simple investments that make growing fruit more joyful.

As always, feel free to pass on this email to a friend and encourage them to [join](#) our outstanding group of fruit growers. It is a small investment that leads to tasty rewards!

Best wishes,

Mark Wolbers  
President, APFGA