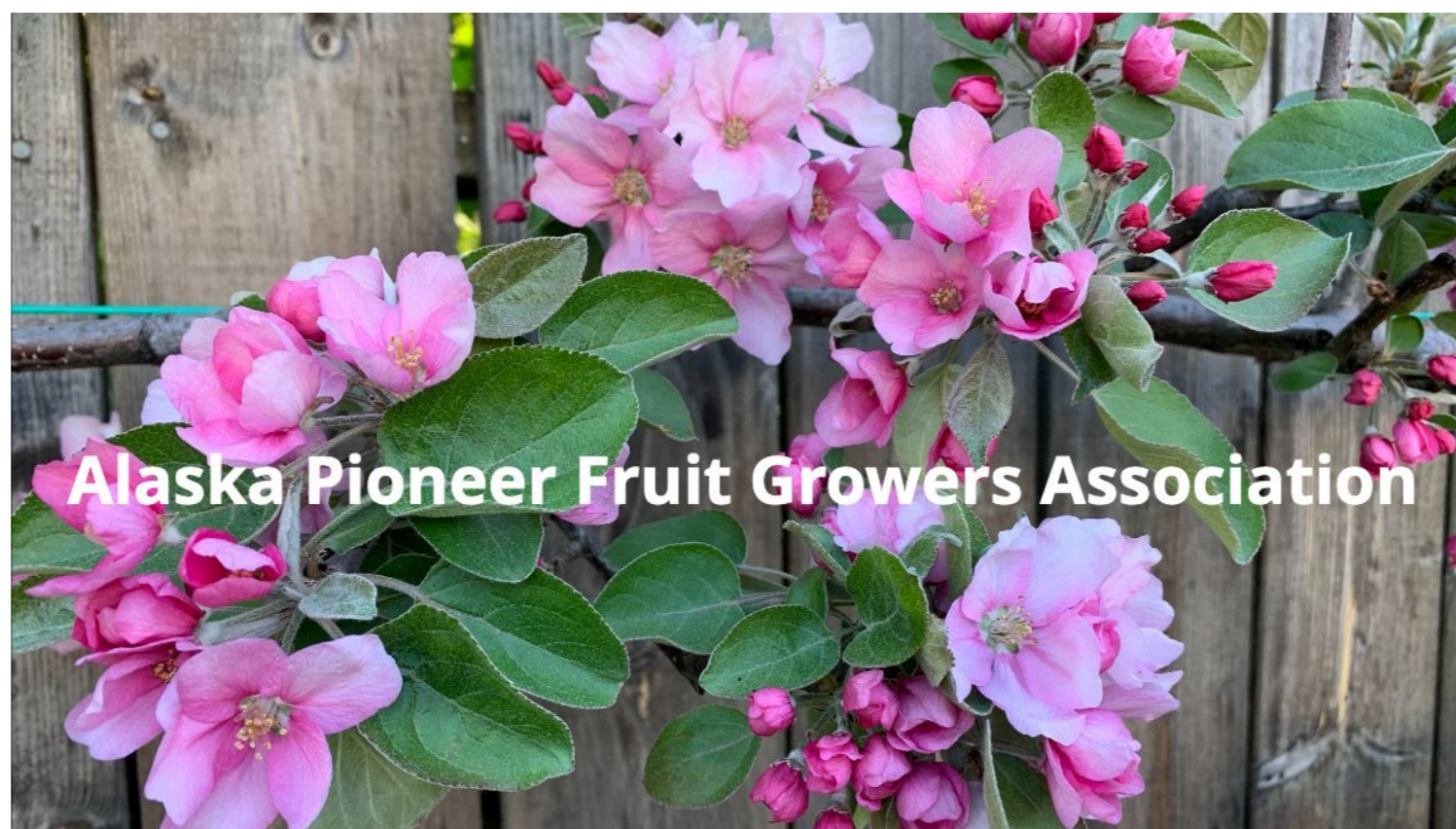


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Alaska Pioneer Fruit Growers Association

Hello Fruit Growers!

I welcomed the rains on Wednesday in the Anchorage area since they forced me inside for a bit. They allowed me to catch my breath, get caught up on a few emails, and write a bit. The blossoms dropped on the fruit trees this week and only a few trees and bushes still have some flowers. The picture above is from an Almata apple, a mid-size apple that is red fleshed and consequently has a pink flower.

About 30 members attended the blossom tour at the Brown Hen Farm on June 6. We extend our thanks to Barb Henjum and Jeff Brownlee for hosting the event and sharing their beautiful orchard areas with our members. It was nice to connect with people after the past year.

Those plants that were set back by winter are recovering. If you had fruit trees or bushes killed or damaged by the cold weather, please let me know the kind/variety and damage observed. I thought our winter was fairly benign, with no extreme temperature spikes, yet I had trees that showed more winter damage than the previous year.

Our State Fair apple, in particular, had dieback on the branch tips, was slow to leaf out, and failed to flower this spring. It is rated to Zone 3, but the developers at the University of Minnesota say that it is prone to biennial bearing. I wonder if the same mechanisms that lead to biennial bearing also fail to prepare the tree adequately for the onset of winter or vice versa?

In another winter-related experiment, the Jewel Black Raspberries did not show sufficient cold hardiness. The second-year canes died back to 6" above ground. I will give them one more year, and see if I can manage to protect them better. If anyone has tried the supposedly zone 3 "Pequot" black raspberries developed in Minnesota and sold by St. Lawrence Nurseries, please let me know about your experience.

If you fertilize your blueberries, now is the time to mix a bit of fish emulsion (2 Tbsp/gal water per 25 sq ft) and spread it around the plants. It really does help the plants to grow and produce larger fruit. In the lower 48, they will make two more applications each one month apart. However, this year, I am going to apply only one more application next month. Our blueberries were slow to shut down at the end of the season, and I wonder if our season is a bit too short for their fertilizer recommendations.

The apples are forming and it is time to start thinning the fruit. Generally, I keep the king blossom apples since they flower first and consequently are the largest. Although it is possible to remove the unwanted little apples by bending the stem, I find it much quicker and easier to simply use a sharp set of shears. Crab apples do not require thinning since their apples are small regardless. Large apples however, will become larger without so much competition for plant resources and regular watering.

Start by thinning each flower cluster to one apple. Then, examine your branch. Consider the size, age and structure of the branch. I often space apples on the branch at intervals of 6-8", and for younger branches, select apples closer to the center of the tree to avoid branch breakage. If your tree is very young, you might forego having fruit so the tree can be bigger and stronger for next year!

I noticed a couple of haskaps starting to turn color today. Hopefully, you are prepared to defend your berries from the robins with either nets, sprays or robotic lasers! Remember, the birds do not wait until they are ripe. They will start eating as soon as the color changes. Remember to water regularly, otherwise your berry size will be small.

You should check to see that you are stocking Spinosad spray. This is an effective spray for saw fly larva, the little caterpillars that so effectively defoliate currants. They will be here soon. You will need to read the labels, since some sprays like Monterey Garden Insect Spray don't declare very loudly that they are actually Spinosad.

Our friend, Gary Masog, continues to recover. I was happy that he felt well enough to call me Wednesday and we were able to talk awhile. He is in good spirits and is motivated to get better. Like a true fruit grower, he is determined not to miss the apple pressing in September!

All the best,

Mark Wolbers
President, APFGA