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Hello Fruit Growers!

On the back cover of the July/August Cook’s Illustrated was a collection of berries that included haskaps (honeyberries). This berry has quickly gained traction in the United States. They were relatively unknown when APFGA first imported these plants for our members almost 15 years ago. Now, varieties like Tundra (in the photo above) are sold in box stores.

In our orchard, the robins have figured out how to land on and depress the netting to snag the occasional berry. They do this at the risk of being hosed if I am nearby. Luckily, the bushes are so prolific that the few berries the birds and our chickens successfully poach do not impact the harvest in any significant way.

Although the birds don’t mind unripe berries, you might want to check before picking. The berries will be colored all the way through when fully ripe. Test by biting a berry in half. Your taste buds and eyes will converge on whether you want to pick yet. Those berries with the best sun exposure will ripen first, so you might pick in a layered strategy as opposed to picking the entire bush all at once. Early varieties like Cinderella are already ripe where they receive good sun. If you have been providing regular water, you should have some well-sized fruit!

The hot/dry weather has continued to accelerate our fruit development. As of June 26, we were 10 days to 2 weeks ahead of where we were last year. Here are the latest Growing Degree Day totals for our East Anchorage orchard.

June 19	880 GDD/42°	480 GDD/50°	Soil 59.5° F/6”	58° F/12”
June 26	1060 GDD/42°	590 GDD/50°	Soil 62.5° F/6”	60.6° F/12”

Prairie Magic apples range in size from 28-33 mm (photo below). Evans and Romance cherries are 10-11mm. Blueberries are setting fruit and Gooseberries are around 13mm. Our fruit set before thinning was about 80% for the apples, but only 25-50% on the cherries. I think this was a product of everything blooming at once, and a smaller contingent of native pollinators this year. My lesson from this is that I should have a hive on site to ensure an adequate number of pollinators.



One testament to our warm summer is that June bearing strawberries are coming on, and it is still June! There are always a few spittle bugs. You can hose them off, or pinch around in the foam until you find the little green nymph making the foam and remove them permanently. Now that the strawberries are done flowering and the fruit is turning red, I will keep them under cover until they are done ripening. This keeps the birds from pecking the berries and should rain and cool weather move in (unlikely this year!), I can protect the fruit.

Raspberries are forming fruit and this crop also looks to be two weeks ahead of normal. I grow raspberries in raised beds and have already selected the primo canes that will flower and fruit next summer. This allows me to trim out the remainder of the new shoots to improve air circulation around this year’s fruiting canes (floricanes).

Rick Polzin, the head meader at Bleeding Heart Brewery in Palmer is looking to purchase fruit and berries locally. He would like to build long-term relationships with local growers and needs enough of each kind of fruit and berry to make 30 gallons of juice. Give him a call at 907-354-5904 if you have an excess of fruit to sell.

Finally, our weather has been very dry with only .07” of rain recorded at the Anchorage International Airport for the month of June. Your plants will like it if you give them a half-inch of water every 2 or 3 days. My recommendation is to do this in the morning so that the plants dry fairly quickly as you don’t want problems with mold or fungus. If your haskaps are really thick with plant material, water underneath the plants to prevent moldy berries. Good pruning leads to good air circulation in your trees and plants and this is key for preventing fungal/mold issues.

Until next time, enjoy the first berries of the season!

All the best,

Mark Wolbers
President, APFGA

