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Hello Fruit Growers!

The blossoms in our East Anchorage garden are shifting. A recent thunderstorm and hail dropped most of the blossoms on the Simonet pictured above and the other early blooming apple and cherry trees. The later blooming apples like State Fair and Zestar are still in flower along with the Whitney, Red Spendor and Royalty crabs. I have been impressed by the long bloom time of the Whitney. I see why it is recommended as a pollinator among its other attributes.

I have been pleasantly surprised that we didn’t lose any plants over the winter. It would be good to know how everyone else has fared. It helps the club build and share knowledge about what is hardy. If you had any fruit plants killed or damaged by the winter cold, please [email me](#) and tell me the fruit and variety.

Hopefully, you took my advice in my last email and sprayed Bt on your honeyberries to zap the leaf rollers. Your next step is to be ready to cover them with bird netting once the berries begin to turn blue. The robins will begin feeding on them as soon as they turn color, even though they are not yet ripe.

When you cover your honeyberries, be careful about securing the bottom of your netting. Juncos are particularly prone to hopping under any net openings near the ground. Robins are also pretty skilled at finding holes and openings to get in, but of course completely incapable of getting back out! I try to roll up any loose extra netting tightly and anchor it to prevent birds from getting entangled. So, once you have your netting on, be sure to check every day that you haven’t inadvertently captured some feathered friends. Sometimes you have to look carefully because small birds may hide and sit quietly to avoid being noticed.

Once the apple blossoms drop, it is time to spray Neem Oil, particularly if you have issues with fungus (apple scab). I am going to spray Neem Oil this year just as a preventative since I have one tree (Royalty Crab) in a dank area that occasionally has some fungus. Neem Oil is an excellent organic spray that does a number of good things. It inhibits fungus spores from germinating, it smothers insects like aphids and mites, and it interrupts the life cycle of molting insects.

There are two types of Neem Oil on the market. One is cold-pressed Neem Oil. It has the consistency of bacon fat at 65 degrees and I purchased mine at Mill and Feed. To emulsify the oil in your spray, you will need to mix in dish soap at a 4:1 ratio. I recommend heating the bottle of Neem Oil in some hot water to liquify it. Then into one gallon of warm water add 4 teaspoons of Neem Oil and 1 teaspoon of dish soap (I prefer Dawn). Mix constantly to keep the oil emulsified while you spray all plant surfaces.

The other kind of Neem Oil is called Clarified Hydrophobic Extract of Neem Oil. I found this recently at Home Depot (Triple Action Neem Oil by Southern AG). This Neem Oil has been processed to remove the active ingredient found in Aza Max (azadirachtin). However, it is still effective in controlling fungus and insects, and it is easier to use. Unlike cold-pressed Neem Oil, Clarified Hydrophobic Extract is liquid at cooler temperatures and this product has already been formulated with an emulsifier. To use, you simply mix 2 Tablespoons to one gallon of water. Like any oil emulsion, you need to shake or mix constantly while you spray.

Board member Nick Riordan recently brought an article by Bob Purvis to my attention from a [1990 APFGA Newsletter](#). In the article, Bob was relaying news about what Clair Lammers was doing in Fairbanks. Clair had apparently been grafting cherries, cherry plums and plums onto Prunus Padus (invasive chokecherry). Now, I had been told that Prunus Padus was not compatible for grafting. Of course, after reading this, I immediately made some grafts on my neighbor’s tree that was overhanging my fence to test this out!

Most of you know that I have grafted Romance and Evans cherries onto Prunus Maackii (Amur Chokecherry) and Lawrence Clark used that rootstock for his “Clark” sweet cherries. But, if it is indeed possible to graft to Prunus Padus, grafting might be a solution for folks that have mature trees who want to limit the invasive spread of the seeds that the birds seem to carry everywhere, but want a beautiful tree that produces fruit in a fraction of the time it would take to grow a new tree.



When I grafted our mature Amur choke cherry, the grafts grew incredibly fast. It fruited the second year and the photo above shows it in bloom this year (year 3). I have some Juliet scion wood and would be willing to experiment on a member’s Prunus Padus. I would do bark grafts, and the original limbs would only be removed if the grafts were successful. [Email me](#) if you have a candidate tree you want to experiment on.

As always, feel free to share this email with your friends and encourage them to [join APFGA](#). Please email me anytime should you have any questions, or post your questions and observations on the Member Forums on our [web-page](#) under the Member tab.

Best wishes,

Mark Wolbers
President, APFGA

