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Hello Fruit Growers!

July is here and our first fruits are about to start appearing. At our house we have been working on emptying our freezer in preparation for what will be harvested over the next 10 weeks. The last quart of cherries was just consumed, along with the remainder of the haskaps, but we still have a few blueberries and some juice to go!

Our first fruit is usually the June bearing strawberries. Both of our boxes were replanted this year, so the crop is somewhat delayed but on the way. We grow our strawberries in 4 x 8' boxes covered with hoops bent out of 10' electrical conduit. This allows us to cover the strawberries with plastic when they begin to ripen. This prevents the birds from eating them and keeps them dry while ripening which helps to prevent mold.

The photo above is of our recent planting and trial of the variety Wendy AC. You will notice that this year I am experimenting with putting in a Borage plant or two in each box as a companion planting. The Borage is reported to have a beneficial impact by deterring insect pests, attracting beneficial insects, and even improving the flavor of the berry (really?). I always have Borage in the orchard area and they easily reseed themselves each year. As a plus, their pretty 4-pointed blue flowers are edible with a faint cucumber flavor and can be candied or put in salads. Click the link to read more about strawberry and [Borage companion planting](#).

I recommend that you also check your strawberry plants for pests. The one that we seem to have each year is [spittlebugs](#). These bugs make a mass of bubbles to hide in and will deform your leaves and fruit. They don't seem to permanently hurt the plant, but who wants a berry with spittle on it? They generally hide on the underside of the leaf. You can tell, because the leaf will be slightly deformed. Just turn the leaf over to check as in the picture below, and you can wash them off or do what I do and simply find them in the foam and squish them. I generally go for the more permanent solution.



Our apples did not like last winter. One tree has taken a year off and three others have reduced fruit set. However, the two large apple varieties that seem to produce consistently year after year regardless of conditions are Prairie Magic and Lee 27. If I could only have one apple in my yard it would be Prairie Magic. It's a dependable, well-mannered tree with great tasting crisp apples that are large, multi-purpose, and keeps reasonably well in refrigeration.

Hopefully, you have thinned your apples. If you are like me, you often think you have thinned well, but later you will look up and notice more apples. I laughed last year when I thought I had picked all of the Lee 27 apples only to come out and find an apple or two under the tree every couple of days for the next two weeks! The tree is very vigorous with prolific leaves which makes it a challenge to not only find all of the young apples to thin, but to simply find the apples when they are ripe.

It was difficult to believe the temperatures in the Northwest recently. It was simply unheard of to see temperatures in excess of 100 degrees from Oregon up through British Columbia. There was significant damage to the berry crops that were just beginning to be harvested. Apple growers in Washington's Eastern Skagit County lost between 10-30% of their crop. The apples in direct sunlight had surface temperatures of 145-155 degrees which literally cooked the apples. Climate change is causing increasingly extreme weather events that have large economic consequences. Click the link to read more about the [damage to the berry crops](#).

Earlier this spring, I wrote about the vole damage sustained by our raspberries and an Aurora haskap (aka honeyberry). Surprisingly, although thoroughly chewed, they have mostly lived. The haskap had a couple branches that needed to be pruned out. The vegetation is a little sparser, but it has set fruit and is recovering. I had to cut out only a couple raspberry canes. The rest magically leafed out and are in the process of flowering. I'm happy, but somewhat curious how they managed to persevere!

Like me, you have probably been watching pollinators at work as the plants blossom. The raspberries are flowering and there are bees and bumblebees buzzing away. The bumble bees are work-horses in our yard and play a significant role as major pollinators of blueberries, haskaps and raspberries, and as significant pollinators of the apple and cherry trees. I try to be mindful to keep food sources such as the borage, blue bells, crane's bill geranium and columbine around for them when the fruit is done blossoming. Bumblebees thrive in Alaska. Click the link to read more about these [fascinating pollinators](#).

Lastly, keep an eye on your currants for saw-fly larva. They will be on the plants soon. Although the plants live, it must be embarrassing for them to have all of their leaves chopped off by these bugs. You can save them from nakedness by having some Spinosad ready to spray the critters with when they appear. Remember, Bt does not work on saw-fly larva. And, if all else fails, it is possible with some determination to handpick the bugs.

All the best,

Mark Wolbers
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