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Hello Fruit Growers!

Welcome to July. This is when summer begins to hit its stride. The strawberries are on, or will be on in a couple days and the honeyberries are plumping up. I think I must of caught the same junco under the honeyberry netting three times before I found the seven different small holes in the net!

Many plants, such as the Jewel gooseberry above, set so much fruit that they may need stakes to hold them upright. When stems get weighted down with fruit, they head for the ground. Like your Mom's warning about your face, if left in this position the stem may harden permanently into that shape! I encourage you to check your small berry bushes (blueberries, currants, gooseberries, honeyberries, etc). If you see branches arching towards the ground, consider putting braces under the limbs or staking them to encourage more upright growth.

In my last missive, I was encouraging you to thin the fruit on your regular apple trees. Hopefully, you have finished this task, or at least think so. I always carry my scissors in my back pocket because it seems that every time I go past one of the apple trees, I notice apples that I have missed! This is especially true on the underside of the branches and at the top. Trees with a lot of leaves are the most difficult.

I am also giving the apple trees a second look to see if my fruit spacing is appropriate. I subconsciously (I swear!) leave more apples than I intend to. So, I am thinning more, giving consideration to the apples that get the best light, and even trimming a few leaves, if necessary, to give better sun exposure. This also generally means dropping apples on the underside of the branch in favor of those on top getting the sun.

I have also learned through previous malfeasance, that one should not leave a lot of large heavy apples towards the top of a relatively young tree. I was treated last year to the disturbing sight of our nine year old Lee 27 starting to bend over from the excessive fruit on the top of the tree. A giant stake and a bungee cord saved the day (and tree), but I don't recommend this as a growing strategy.

With the raspberries flowering and setting fruit, this might be a good time to consider thinning the new canes. I grow raspberries in 2 X 8 raised beds, so my management needs to be a bit more intensive. I have already selected next year's fruiting canes and have cut out the remaining one-year canes. The main advantage of this is to increase airflow and circulation. Once fruit begins ripening, I want to keep mold to a minimum.

With that in mind, I would offer a simple strategy concerning watering. Do your watering in the morning so that the leaf surfaces dry out relatively quickly. Moisture and damp conditions lead to mold problems on berries, especially honeyberries and strawberries. With our strawberries coming ripe, they will be protected from water from this point on. They are under hoops that support a clear plastic cover. It keeps the birds out, and keeps them dry should the weather be wet.

As for the honeyberries, as they ripen, my watering habit will change from overhead sprinkling to only watering at the base of the bushes. Their droopy habit and thick layering of stems and leaves limits air circulation and provides a perfect environment for mold. Consequently, I prune aggressively every year to thin the canopy and open space at the ground while propping up limbs to encourage upright growth. Even with these interventions they seem pretty determined to be shaggy mounds!

Finally, I received a question about caring for fruit trees that are grown in lawns. The primary recommendation is to simply treat your lawn as an organic crop. No weed killers or treatments that will upset the natural soil environments of fungi and bacteria. Use only a mulching mower to return clippings to the soil and don't worry about clover and weeds. As with any fruit trees, any fertilizer should only be added in the spring so that new growth is not encouraged at the end of the season. But first, always get a soil or leaf tissue test and then look for natural amendments that can be used with your lawn. Jeff Lowenfels had some great suggestions on maintaining a healthy lawn and soil environment in his recent ADN column titled, "[Think Rabbits are Plaguing Your Garden You're Off by a Hare.](#)"

As always, feel free to send me questions or forward this email to a friend with an invitation to [join APFGA](#). You are also welcome to mask-up and stop by to see how I am doing something if that would be helpful. Just [email me](#) to arrange a visit. The Deiser's still have a few grape plants looking for a home. Email [Dawn](#) if you are interested.

Until next time, enjoy your strawberries!

Mark Wolbers
President, APFGA