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Hello Fruit Growers!

We had a very nice orchard tour in West Anchorage last Saturday, organized by APFGA Board Director Ilona Farr. The weather actually cooperated and we enjoyed seeing all four properties, sampling fruit, and eating some goodies provided by our hosts. Many thanks to the Stryzaks, Rankins, Casons and Loretta Hodson for opening their properties to the club.

This week, cooler, wetter weather will dominate the state. Our Growing Degree Day (GDD) weekly accumulations have fallen somewhat with the onset of rain. However, as of Sunday, we still maintained a 13-day lead over last year (base 42°). The Growing Degree Day (GDD) totals and soil temperature data as of July 31 and August 7 at our orchard in East Anchorage were as follows:

7.31.22 1815 GDD/42° 1078 GDD/50° Soil 62.5° F/6" 61° F/12"
8.7.22 1945 GDD/42° 1155 GDD/50° Soil 60.5° F/6" 60° F/12"

At the end of June and early July we were accumulating 170 GDD/42° each week. Whereas the last two weeks have seen accumulations of 118 and 130 GDD/42° respectively. We can expect our GDD accumulation totals to drop even more this week due to the cooler temperatures and rain. Despite the weather, currants, gooseberries and blueberries are/or will soon be ready, and raspberry harvest continues. Take note that Carmine Jewel cherries (photo above) are now sufficiently ripe to begin cracking with the wet weather. At this point the cracked cherries are not very sweet, but they are still usable for baking or wine if picked before they mold.

Apples are sizing nicely and early apples such as Parkland, Norland, Yellow Transparent and Golden Uralian will be ripening in about two weeks. As the apples increase in size, they put more weight on the trees. With the ground saturated with rain it is important to keep an eye on your trees. Young, free-standing trees have been known to pull out of the wet soil or bend over under fruit load. If this happens, tie them back to a stake. I generally recommend that free standing tree whips be planted with an 8 foot stake. The stake should stay in place for the first decade so that the tree can be tied and supported for fruit load, wind or snow. You might lose a branch, but your tree won't snap in half or fall over. In the spring, the tree is untied from the stake until later in the summer when there is fruit on the tree or high winds are in the forecast.

August is a good month to plant trees. It gives the trees time to get settled before winter sets in and then they are ready to go next spring. I am often reminded by club members that apple and cherry trees are pretty forgiving and will do OK without much fuss. However, I truly believe it is a good investment to send soil samples to an outside lab for analysis and to amend the soil in your potential orchard area one year prior to planting. You will have better quality and larger fruit, and your trees will have a good nutrient base to grow upon for many years. Remember that free standing trees get to be fairly large, and the feeder roots extend well past the drip line. Consequently, the size of the area that should be amended should be based on the mature size of the tree, not the small whip being planted!

Soil tests should be taken every couple of years and August is an excellent time to do that. If you are inclined to do regular soil tests like I am, then you might want to invest in a [soil sampling probe](#) to make sampling easier. Some major nutrients such as Phosphorous (P) and Potassium (K) are not very mobile in the soil. So, if you don't have adequate amounts in the soil before you plant, they are difficult to incorporate later. (Go to the [APFGA Website](#) for more information on soil testing and labs under the "Research" tab.)

I am a big proponent of wood chips for the orchard floor. Last year, I began an experiment of inoculating the orchard floor with *Stropharia rugosoannulata* (aka Winecap or Garden Giant) mushrooms. These mushrooms are a choice edible, and are reported to be symbiotically helpful with some garden plants. So, the question was, would they benefit fruit trees? (photo below: Winecaps under Evans cherries)



Paul Stamets in his book *Mycelium Running*, labels this mushroom as a saprophyte or saprophytic, "an intermediary between primary and secondary decomposers since this species first digests fresh debris and then continues to thrive as complex communities join with it to create soil."

As for whether they benefit fruit trees, they do not seem directly symbiotic like Boletes and birch trees, but do benefit the orchard in a number of ways. One, they are delicious and consequently they bring more attention by the grower to the fruit trees they are growing under. Second, (seriously now) [research from China](#) shows that the fungus increases soil organic matter and available phosphorus among other benefits. So, you may be able to improve your soil by growing mushrooms and by extension, improve your fruit.

If you are engaging in the two-dimensional technique of [espalier](#), this is the time to summer prune. The new shoots coming from the cordons have stopped growing and are lignifying (hardening). Cut these shoots back to the whorl of 5 little leaves at the base. This will discourage the shoots from growing next year and encourage the setting of flower buds. Any new growth for your cordons or frame should be moved to your wires and tied to set the shape you are working towards.

Kevin Irwin forwarded to me the following note and apple survey link from UAF: In order to provide better integrated pest management information and services across the state of Alaska, the UAF Integrated Pest Management Team is conducting a fruit tree pollinator survey for 2022. This is an ANONYMOUS SURVEY and will be used to facilitate the development of useful outreach and educational resources as well as guide potential research to improve pest management in our state. The anonymous results of the survey will be made public at a later date. [Please Click Here to take the brief Survey.](#)

We also have a number of events coming up as we race towards the culmination of our growing season. Please put the following on your calendar!

Sunday, August 28: Early Apple Pressing at Brown Hen Farm, Chugiak

Sunday, September 25: Late Apple Pressing at Brown Hen Farm, Chugiak

APFGA Board Director Doug Damberg is organizing the apple pressings for members. More information on how to sign up to press your apples will be forthcoming. We now have two apple presses, but that means we need some more volunteers. If you are willing to help at the apple pressings, please [email Doug](#). It is a bit of work, but fun tasting everyone's apple juice.

We also have two apple/fruit tastings coming up. The APFGA board has decided to make both tastings free and open to the public. So, feel free to invite your friends to come discover the apple varieties that they will want to grow or graft at the spring grafting workshop!

Sunday, September 11: Early Apple/Fruit Tasting, Anchorage Begich Middle School 2:00-3:30 pm

Saturday, October 1: Late Apple/Fruit Tasting, Mid-Valley Greenhouse, Wasilla 2:00-3:30 pm

APFGA Board Director Val Glooschenko is organizing the tastings, and will soon provide more information along with a request for you to bring samples of your apples and fruit to the events. Please [email Val](#) should you have any questions.

Finally, please remember to send me your [rootstock request](#) for spring 2022. This is the best way to guarantee that you will get what you want or need for grafting next season.

All the best,

Mark Wolbers
President, APFGA