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Hello Fruit Growers!

Harvest time has begun in earnest. I generally know when our fruit is sweet and ripe because the yellow jackets begin eating them! They have been pests lately, eating gooseberries, blueberries, yellow and purple raspberries and cherries.

In response, I have put out more traps like the one in the photo above that is hanging in a bush of Juliet cherries. The traps are easy to make. Simply take a soda or water bottle and cut the top off. Invert and place the top into the remaining bottle. Seal with some tape and string a hook through the top to hang the trap. Then, bait the trap with fruit that the yellow jackets are eating. I literally take the fruit they have partially eaten, squish it a bit, and put that into the trap along with a little water. For some reason, once they fly in, they can't fly out. Kind of like the roach hotel for yellow jackets.

In Anchorage, we are getting some serious rain. I recommend that you check your plants. Sometimes, the combination of heavy ripe fruit, and then the added weight of water from the rain can pull a plant down. During the only half-hour that it stopped raining on Monday, I worked to tie up the young Juliet cherry in the photo above. It is really loaded with ripe fruit, and the rain pushed it over the edge causing a number of branches to bend to the ground.

The non-stop monsoon continued through Tuesday dumping over 1.5 inches in East Anchorage. The fact that it was so wet for over 48 hours meant that any damaged fruit developed mold quickly. I went out Tuesday evening to survey the cherries and realized I needed to pick the Carmine Jewel first thing Wednesday.

Despite my diligent watering, 50% of the Carmine Jewel cherries split, which was an invitation to the yellow jackets to feed and mold to develop. The yellow jackets didn't stop flying even during the rain. I recommend that you check your cherry plants and drop any compromised fruit or hanging seeds that could be a vector for mold.

If you pull a split cherry right after splitting, it is soft but still salvageable. I picked 22 lbs of Carmine Jewel cherries (brix of 11vs 12 last year) off our one bush, losing maybe 5% to mold and insects. I pitted them immediately in the garage and moved them to the freezer. I learned early on that it wasn't wise to pit cherries inside a house with white walls! It always looks like a crime scene when I'm done, so the deed is best done outside or in the garage.



Often the yellow jackets would be on the cherries as I picked them. I discovered that when they have their head inside the cherry, they are unaware as I gently pull the cherry off the stem and place them on the ground . . . and then have the satisfaction of stomping the little buggers into oblivion! (Ah, pandemic release . . .)

Our Romeo cherry received the same watering treatment and had almost no splits. Since they have a similar flavor profile, I would say Romeo is more suitable to our climate patterns— provided you keep it watered. I had a number of splits on a Juliet cherry bush that did not receive regular watering, however the Juliet grafted onto Prunus Maackii in front (also not regularly watered) had almost no splits. It may be that those cherries were a little less ripe than the bush, or the rootstock was not so quick to push massive amounts of water to the fruit. The Evans cherries of course didn't bat an eye about the weather.

Hopefully, you have used branch supports to train your blueberries to grow upright. Northblue is a fantastic variety, with numerous large tasty berries, but its growing habit is not always upwards. Consequently, without intervention, once the fruit ripens the weight of the fruit will bend the branch to the ground. This gives slugs access to the plant, and they love blueberries. Keeping the branches off the ground makes it harder for slugs to get to the fruit, although robins will still peck at a ripe berry as they hop past the plant, and yellow jackets like them as well.

If you grow currants or gooseberries, you should keep watch for dropped berries. That is generally a sign that the fruit is getting close to being ripe and you should be thinking about when you will pick the plant. Our Swedish Black Currant began to drop a few berries, and sure enough they were ready. I left a few on the plant to snack on, but harvested the rest and put them in the freezer to process later. Our Hinomaki Yellow gooseberry is ripe enough to eat according to the yellow jackets, and the Jewel gooseberry is starting to drop fruit.

It is hard to believe that we are almost to the end of meteorological summer (vs astronomical summer), defined as the months of June, July and August in the northern hemisphere. Consequently, the early apples will be ripe soon. I ate our first Golden Uralian apple Tuesday. The seeds are just beginning to turn, consequently, its almost time to start pressing apples!

We will have two pressings hosted by Barbara Henjum and Jeff Brownlee at their Brown Hen Farm in Peters Creek ([directions](#)). The first pressing for early apples will be on Saturday, September 5. The second pressing for late apples will be on Sunday, September 27. We will have two presses operating. However, due to the pandemic there are important guidelines to follow.

To facilitate grinding the apples, your fruit needs to be in 4 or 5-gallon buckets. If you bring your apples in a cardboard box or other container, I will ask you to transfer them into an empty bucket. Bring only clean apples and containers for your juice. Wash any from the ground and drain thoroughly. Put a hole in the bottom of your bucket if you need to drain off water. Limit is 5 buckets of apples per person. A 5-gallon bucket of apples will yield a gallon and a half of juice. If you want the pressed apple residue (pomice), bring a heavy bag or suitable container. If you want a particular mix of apples for your juice, place them in your buckets accordingly.

Apples can be picked when ripe and held, if necessary, until the pressing. The cooler the storage, the better. Apples that have gone soft but not rotten are fine for pressing. If you want to save some of your juice for drinking later in the year, the pressed juice freezes very well.

Important: All persons in attendance must wear a mask. To maintain proper crowd size and social distancing, we will require that you come at an assigned time in the afternoon. To request a time, simply [email me](#) and tell me how many buckets of apples you want to press. If you are only available early or late afternoon, let me know. I will email you back with a time to show up. You can request a time slot up through the day before the pressing. If you do this, you will then have a "pressing appointment!"

Be well, and enjoy the bounty of our summer.

Mark Wolbers  
President, APFGA