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Hello Fruit Growers!

We thank Dan and Nancy Moore for a fabulous orchard tour at Fire Apple Orchard last Saturday. Our hosts provided some grilled brats, augmented with some yummy dishes shared by members. The morning started cold but the sun was shining and by noon it was wonderful to be outside. It was the kind of day that has been lacking this August! After lunch we had a tour of the orchards. The types and varieties of fruit grown is quite impressive, and it is nice to see an example of fruit trees on post and wire as well as a traditional freestanding orchard. If you are curious about what Dan and Nancy are growing, you can click the link and see the [list of fruit and varieties](#) grown at Fire Apple Orchard.

I hadn't seen many yellow jackets this summer and thought I might not have much of a problem until I noticed the Aurora Haskaps (aka honeyberries) were being consumed! This was the first time I had yellow jackets on any haskap in a major way. This is probably because of the cold summer and the fact that other fruits were not ripe yet. In any case, I decided to harvest them to keep them from the insects. The Aurora berries could have ripened more, but since they are not a tart variety there didn't seem any point to leaving them hang and losing more.

With the removal of the Aurora haskaps, the yellow jackets have turned their attention to the ripening cherries. The constant rain is causing the cherries to split. Once they split, the cherries are an invitation to yellow jackets. It is pretty amazing how quickly the yellow jackets can hollow out a cherry and just leave a pit hanging!

The splits started last week on Romeo which was the first to ripen and then Tuesday the Carmine Jewel began to split in earnest. I picked and pitted the splits. Testing the juice in the pit box showed that my overall brix for the Romeo was 13 and 11 for the Carmine Jewel. I would like to see the average brix closer to 15 on the Romeo and 12 on the Carmine Jewel before I harvest.

With the onset of constant wet weather, mold is a problem. Remove or drop any moldy or damaged fruit. Mold spores can spread quite easily in damp conditions.

To combat the yellow jackets, I am putting out traps. You can buy traps or make your own that you bait with sweet sugar/honey water and a couple drops of dish soap to break the water tension. You should also add some vinegar, preferably apple cider vinegar, since that keeps honeybees from accidentally going in the trap. For more information, click the link to see how Tom Plochar deals with [yellow jackets](#) when they attack his grapes in Minnesota.

I should also explain "brix." Brix is a measure of how sweet something is. A wine grape will be 24-30 brix. The apple juice I pressed last year had a brix of 13. Brix can provide helpful information about fruit ripeness, although it can vary year to year somewhat depending on the weather. You measure brix by putting a drop of juice from the fruit you are testing onto a refractometer. ([Amazon Link](#)) You hold the instrument to your eye and up to the light to read the scale. Easy. And more importantly, these devices are relatively inexpensive at under \$20!

As we zoom towards the end of the growing season, just a reminder to be getting your game on for winter. This is the time of year to deal with voles/mice. Either purchase spiral tree guards, or put 2-3 foot-high metal cloth (1/2" mesh) around your tree trunks. Embed the screens a couple of inches into the ground. Voles can kill your fruit tree by girdling the trunk. You should trap or bait them now to lower their numbers. If needed, you should also have fencing and protection against rabbits, moose and bear ready to go if it isn't already installed. Finally, be sure to put metal name tags on the plants and grafts you added this year so it won't be a memory test next spring.

We will have two member-only apple 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 Sunday, September 5. The second pressing for late apples will be on Sunday, September 26.

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, you will be asked to transfer them into an empty bucket. Each 5-gallon bucket of apples will yield a gallon and a half of juice. Bring only clean apples and enough containers for your juice. Wash any fruit from the ground and drain thoroughly. Put a hole in the bottom of your bucket if you need to drain off water. Limit is 3 press loads (8 - 9 buckets) of apples per person each day. 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. For those that want to press Yellow Transparent, I recommend that you mix your buckets of apples with a firmer variety so that they grind and press better. The fresh juice freezes well if you want to have juice for drinking later in the year. Each pressing is by appointment only. Click the link to schedule a time for the [September 5 early apple pressing](#).

We will need 3 volunteers each day to help with grinding apples, pouring juice and working the press. It is a bit of work, but fun to taste everyone's juice. Click the link to [Email me](#) if you can help out on either date.

Yael Hickok who manages the Boyer orchard and greenhouse wanted me to let you know that they are selling apples. They are holding Wednesday U-Picks (by appointment only) on 9/1, 9/8, 9/22 and selling apples to the public on Friday, September 17, 3-6 pm and Saturday, October 2, 11:00 am to 2:00 pm. For more information, check out their [Facebook page](#). All proceeds go towards the maintenance and preservation of the orchard.

We normally hold an apple tasting event at the BP Energy Center in mid-September so folks can discover what apples they want to grow and connect with those who grow them. However, due to Alaska's low vaccination rate and the current pandemic, BP has cancelled all September events. My wife has kindly given her consent to hold an outdoor apple tasting in our yard (weather dependent) on either Saturday or Sunday, September 18 or 19 in the afternoon. However, to make this work, we will need some folding tables. Click the link to [email me](#) if you are willing to bring a folding table to the event. If I can get the tables and some help, we can make this happen, provided the weather cooperates.

And lastly, if you have yet to submit your [rootstock request](#) for Spring 2022, click the link and send it to me. I am also beginning to organize for our monthly winter meetings in December, January, February and March. If you would like to present at one of those meetings or have a suggestion for a presenter, please click the link to [email me](#).

All the best,

Mark Wolbers
President, APFGA

