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Hello Fruit Growers!

Happy August everyone. It's that time of the year when the fruit really starts rolling in. The June Bearing Strawberries are just wrapping up while the raspberries have started and we are harvesting honeyberries ("Svetlana" pictured above). I saw the first couple ripe blueberries and was looking forward to tasting my first crop of saskatoons. But, apparently so were the robins who hung sideways on the stem and made quick work of the ripening berries.

With all the ripening fruit, it's time to sit back and enjoy the crop. Hah, just kidding! Here are a few things to consider doing in between the harvesting, eating and processing of your fruit.

Deal with your mouse/vole population now. Hopefully, in preparation for winter you have put two-foot high, ½ inch mesh screens around your fruit trees and anchored them a couple of inches into the soil. In addition, it is recommended that you trap or bait the mice/voles to lower the numbers of fruit tree killers in your neighborhood. I do "mouse Mondays." That's my way of remembering to check my bait stations each week. I have them positioned around the perimeter of my yard, and by checking them weekly, I keep them well stocked so they do their job.

Yellow jackets can be a fruit pest. They like to eat ripe soft bodied fruits like raspberries and cherries. Dan Moore at Fire Apple Orchard in Big Lake sent me photos of their sweet cherries that had been eaten by yellow jackets. Not a pretty sight. I have put up a yellow jacket trap in the back yard since the sour cherries will be ripening soon. If you need to control their numbers, you can make your own trap, or buy a reusable trap at the hardware store. If yellow jackets are an annual problem, then you might consider putting traps out first thing in the spring to capture the queens as they emerge from winter to look for nesting sites.

As you harvest your berries, watch for moldy ones. You would laugh if you saw me when I find a moldy strawberry. You might think I was diffusing a bomb as I carefully attempt to detach the stem and remove the berry without spraying mold spores all over! If I find moldy berries in the honeyberries or raspberries, I drop them so their spores can't fall down and affect other fruit. Often, a moldy raspberry or strawberry results because I miss picking it after it has ripened. However, for all other cases, we can reduce the chances of mold by making sure our plants have good air circulation through pruning and thinning, and by not creating prolonged high humidity conditions by watering in the evening when the plants are unable to dry out quickly.



Inspect your bush and tree fruit (as well as vines and ornamentals) for [European fruit scale](#) insects. They are present in the Anchorage area and deserve your vigilance! You will know that you have an infestation when you see what looks like the shine of aphid sap on the leaves. Often, I am tipped off to a European Fruit Scale infestation because I will see an ant going up the plant to harvest the dew they secrete. The young hatch and emerge in July from under the female shells and move first to the leaves. As you can see in the enlarged photo above of a honeyberry leaf, they are so small as to be almost invisible, but they are also vulnerable at this stage to Spinosad. So, a weekly spray regime now through the end of the summer is recommended to check the emerging generation. You can also spray the infected plant as soon as you have your fruit off with an all-season horticultural oil, covering all surfaces-especially the bark and branches as this is where the young will eventually migrate later in the season to overwinter. Trust me, I know that trying to spray all surfaces of a honeyberry bush is a challenge.

Once your June bearing strawberries are done fruiting, it is recommended that you cut off the leaves and narrow down the rows to renovate and reinvigorate the planting. Leaf removal also allows old, less productive and potentially disease-infested leaves to be removed from the planting.

Rather than traditional rows of strawberries, we have our strawberries planted in plastic ground cover (24 to a 4' x 8' box). Consequently, on a rotational basis, I dig out a row or two of old plants and start new plants from neighboring runners. To get the plants to grow in their assigned spots, I position runners and put a small rock on the stem to hold the rooting part of the runner in place until they root. Once rooted, I sever the runner from its parent plant.

Your final and most important task is to stock up on vanilla ice cream to eat with your berries! I am enjoying the challenge of eating oodles of berries every day and I notice many of my strategies seem to involve ice cream. The feckless Federal response to the pandemic has been a case study in how not to handle a viral outbreak. Ice cream seems to soothe the realization that our country is probably not going to get a handle on this any time soon. Social distancing is a bit like being stranded on an island. Luckily, my island has great fruit and freezer!

Be well and enjoy the bounty of your efforts.

Mark Wolbers
President, APFGA