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Hello Fruit Growers!

Well, the frost is on the pumpkin, so to speak. Fall is here along with the ripening apples, cherries and kiwis. The ground in the shade will usually start freezing up in three weeks, so if you have things to do in your yard or orchard before winter sets in, now is the time.

I'm two-thirds of the way through our cherry harvest and have pitted 75 lbs so far. Last night I began dehydrating cherries to make room in the freezer. To dry them, I simply thaw the frozen pitted cherries and let them sit in a colander over a pan for a couple hours to drain off the juice. I then lay them out on parchment paper and put them in our convection air oven that has a dehydrate setting. After drying 10 hours, 10 lbs of cherries will reduce to easily fit into a one-quart zip-lock bag. Each quart of frozen cherries will release a little more than a pint of juice. Yum.

The Juliet, Romeo and Evans cherries are large and excellent this year. The ripe Romeos had a brix of 17. The fully ripe Juliet was just below that at a brix of 15.5. The Evans is almost fully ripe and I will pick those and the remaining Romeos next week. To measure the sugar content (brix) I use a brix refractometer. I just put a drop of juice on the sample glass and look through the eye-piece to read the scale. An inexpensive refractometer can be purchased for less than \$20.

Our low temperature in East Anchorage was 30.5 F. last Friday morning. It doesn't seem to have fazed the blueberries or raspberries. On Thursday, I had picked those plants thinking it might be the final picking, but they are still going. Apples and cherries have enough sugar to lower their freeze point. Apples can handle a couple of hours at 28 degrees before they incur freeze damage. So, you don't have to pick your apples early if your temperatures are not going below 29 degrees. One small caveat to that advice: it is important to have an accurate thermometer where your trees are. Internet and TV weather is not accurate, as the temperature varies widely depending on your location. Even within an orchard or yard, there can be temperature variation. I had freeze damage last year on just one apple tree that was in a shaded location where it was the last to get morning sun and consequently was in prolonged cold.

Hopefully, you are eating and sampling your apples and cherries as we speak. You will know when the apples are ripe by the color of the seeds. The seeds will turn black when ripe. However, there are a couple of varieties that I enjoy eating before they are fully ripe. Carroll I think is really good two weeks before it is fully ripe. There comes a point when it no longer tastes green, but is sweet and crunchy yet the seeds are still white. Once fully ripe, it becomes a bit less crisp. Still good, but by then there are other eating apples that take center stage. Whitney is another apple that is crisp and good eating before fully ripe. Once ripe it is soft, but I grow it mainly for juice anyways.

As for cherries, it can be a bit more subtle to know when to pick. I watch the color of the fruit and I will take brix readings to see how they are doing. On the Evans, I watch the color of both the fruit and the stem. The stems turn a golden color as they fully ripen. Often in Alaska, when to pick cherries is a compromise. One has to weigh the pros and cons of weather, splitting, yellow jacket or bird predation versus letting the cherries hang longer for a bit more sweetness.

Hans Huggler, a new club member who recently moved to Anchorage, is looking to buy apples to press and make hard cider. If you have any extra apples to give or sell, please click the link to [email Hans](#), and let him know as soon as possible.

On September 5, we held the apple pressing for early apples and processed about 45 5-gallon pails of apples. The new water press in the photo above gave impressive results with the squeezed apple pomace being quite dry.

We will hold our last pressing for late apples on Sunday afternoon, September 27, at the Brown Hen Farm in Chugiak (click link for [directions](#)). Our hosts, Barb Henjum and Jeff Brownlee do not require masks outside. However, with a Covid positive testing rate in the Anchorage area still hovering around 2%, science would indicate that masks are advised when one is within 6 ft of other individuals. To help maintain social distancing, we will require that you come at an assigned time in the afternoon. To request a time, simply click the link to [email me](#), preferably by Wednesday, 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 on Thursday with a time to show up. You can request a time slot up through the day before the pressing, but be aware that times may be limited or no longer be available.

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 enough containers for your juice. Wash any apples from the ground and drain them thoroughly. Put a hole in the bottom of your bucket if you need to drain off water. The pressing limit is now 6 buckets of apples per person. A 5-gallon bucket of apples will yield 1.75 gallons of juice. If you want the pressed apple residue (pomace), bring a heavy bag or suitable container. If you desire a particular mix of apples for your juice, distribute them in your buckets accordingly.

Should you have apples to press but cannot make the pressing on September 27, [email me](#) as I may be able to offer an alternative.

All the best,

Mark Wolbers
President, APFGA