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Hello Fruit Growers!

Colder temperatures in Southcentral Alaska have really slowed fruit development. I have my fingers crossed that some of the later varieties of apples will ripen a bit more before I am forced to take them off the trees. This is a good summer for a reality check weather-wise. In the future, global warming will create greater variation in our summers. Some will be warmer, others not. This is why I always recommend that a substantial amount of your fruit should be dependable croppers in a cold summer. You can discover what apple varieties still did well this summer at the apple tasting this Saturday, September 18. More on that later.

Once we have some clear nights, temperatures will go down into the 30's. In regards to picking apples, don't feel that you need to panic because of frost. The apple's sugar content lowers the temperature point at which they suffer freeze injury. Apples can handle light frosts and can even tolerate a couple of hours at 28 degrees (click link for more information on [Apple Frost Damage](#)). This is where it pays to have accurate temperature readouts for your yard or know the differential from your regional temperature station. Before I had an accurate temperature sensor in the orchard, I knew that my location could be as much as 5 degrees colder in the fall than that of the reporting station at the Anchorage International Airport. If the TV weather report forecasted a low of 32 degrees, then I needed to be paying attention!

The photo above shows my most beloved tool. It's an extended reach grabber. (This one is from the Walmart Pharmacy area but I have seen them at Lowes, etc.) The little rubber cups at the end are perfect for grabbing an apple or even a cherry that is a bit too high to reach. After breakfast, my fall routine is to go out the door and pick up my grabber tool and a small bucket. I let our chickens out and we head to the fruit trees to pick up that night's dropped apples. I double wash those, and save them in the bucket (photo) to later press into juice. The grabber tool makes this a most enjoyable activity as I don't have to crawl under the trees or even bend over.

The cherries in the other bucket in the photo are Romeos from our grafted P. Maackii (Amur Chokecherry). You know the cherries are large and really ripe when they don't go through the pitter very well. The plunger goes through them but they are too heavy and tender to be picked up on the return stroke. It's a bit more work to pit them, but boy are they nice. The Juliet and Romeo grafted on P. Maackii do seem to yield larger fruit than the bushes. To make picking easier, I have been training the branches into a weeping shape, and pruning off upwards growth. The current third of the tree that is Romeo yielded 13 lbs, which was about the same as our 7-foot bush. So, if you have some of these less-than-stunning ornamental trees, they can be converted!

The late apple pressing will be on Sunday, September 26 and hosted again by Barbara Henjum and Jeff Brownlee at their Brown Hen Farm in Peters Creek ([directions](#)). Apples can be picked when ripe and held outside in a shaded dry spot until the pressing. Apples that have gone soft but not rotten are fine for pressing.

To facilitate grinding the apples, please have your fruit in 4 or 5-gallon buckets. Each 5-gallon bucket of apples will yield about 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 8 buckets (3 press loads) 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. Each pressing is by appointment only. Click the link to [email me](#) for a time for the September 26 late apple pressing.

We will also need volunteers to help with grinding apples, pouring juice and working the press. [Email me](#) if you can help out for the day or even part of the day.

The 2021 Apple Tasting will be this Saturday, September 18, in our backyard at 2667 Wesleyan Dr. ([directions](#)) in East Anchorage. There is a gravel lot across the street for parking. Please bring your apples to taste! Here is the schedule for how the afternoon will unfold:

1:00 pm Those bringing tables arrive. Park in driveway or on street in front of house.

1:30 pm Those bringing apples to taste arrive and set out your fruit. Numbered paper plates will be provided. Write the name of your apple, your name, and general location. 4-6 crab, 3 medium, or two large apples of each kind is probably sufficient.

2:00 pm Apple tasting begins. Rating sheets will be provided. Please bring a pen and a clip-board if you have one.

When you arrive, use the gate on the left side of the house. At the gate will be a sign-in sheet and a jug of hand sanitizer. Please sign in and sanitize your hands. At the apple tasting, maintain 3 feet of social distancing while at the tables. You can start with any numbered plate. Bring a small knife or use the knives provided to cut little wedges of apple to sample. Write your rating beside the corresponding number on the sheet. When completed, give your rating sheet to Mark Findlay. He will copy it and give it back to you to keep.

Keep your rating sheet for next spring. Your ratings and notes can be your guide to deciding what varieties to graft, and consequently what scion wood to pick up at the grafting workshop in April.

Finally, the apple tasting is a great way to introduce people to our club. The apple tasting is for members only, but anyone can join at this point in the year for only \$8 for a family membership! Those you invite or are interested in coming to the apple tasting can simply join online at www.apfga.org.

Hope to see you Saturday!

Mark Wolbers
President, APFGA