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Hello Fruit Growers!

The woods smell strongly of highbush cranberries and the birch trees are turning yellow. These are signs that the end-game of the growing season is upon us. Time to take stock of what needs to be done before winter arrives.

We have harvested most of our Alaska early and mid-season apples. The late season apples like the State Fair in the photo above still need some more time. Many of the larger growers run U-pick operations in the fall. It made me laugh when one of those growers (Fred Deiser) pointed to my tree and said, “ah, the apple that is always picked before it’s ripe!” The apple does look enticing well before it is ready. With the cooler weather and lack of sun, it will be a race to the end of the season to see if there will be enough Growing Degree Days (GDDs) to finish the fruit.

In regards to Growing Degree Day accumulations, here are the latest figures for our orchard in East Anchorage:

9.11.22 2468 GDD/42° 1400 GDD/50° Soil 55.5° F/6” 55.8° F/12”
9.19.22 2546 GDD/42° 1440 GDD/50° Soil 54.5° F/6” 54.6° F/12”

The danger of freezing temperatures is now a possibility as we begin the transition to winter, particularly on clear nights. If you have some late season apple varieties still on the tree, you may want to review the recommendations in the article, [Tips Offered to Handle Apple Frost Damage During Harvest](#). Keep in mind that if the daytime temperatures are no longer above 45° and no warmer days are in the 10 day forecast, then it may not be worth the risk of freeze damage to leave the fruit on the tree during a freeze event, especially if you want to store that fruit. Once the GDD/42° amounts fall to a crawl, there will be little additional fruit development.

We will have the last apple pressing of the season on Sunday, September 25, hosted again by Barbara Henjum and Jeff Brownlee at their Brown Hen Farm in Peters Creek ([directions](#)). 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.

Discard any apples with signs of contamination from birds and animals or contact with manure. You cannot fully wash off pathogenic bacteria like Salmonella, as it will adhere to the surface of the fruit. Apples from the ground should be rinsed and washed with a sanitizer. If using household chlorine, use only plain, unscented household bleach without added thickeners or fragrances. You can make a sanitizer solution by putting 3 tablespoons of bleach into 5 gallons of water.

Limit is 3 press loads (9 buckets) of apples per person each day. If you want the pressed apple residue (pomace), 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 [schedule a time](#) for Sunday. Submit your request by midnight Thursday. Due to the heavy demand, some apples may need to be pressed in the morning. So, you will have a better chance of getting a pressing slot if you select more than one time period, especially if one of your choices is in the morning. Estimate how many buckets you will want to press if you are still picking.



This past weekend, we had the rare occurrence of two days without rain in Anchorage. This allowed me to do a fourth picking of our blueberries, a second picking of the arctic kiwis (photo above) and a final picking of the Hinnomaki Red gooseberries. The Evans cherries were picked earlier in the week. One tree produced 21 lbs and another produced 23 lbs.

I found it interesting that although the two trees are next to each other at the top of our orchard hill, there were distinct differences in the fruit. The tree that produced 23 lbs is a grafted tree purchased from Costco on unknown rootstock. Those cherries had a brix of 11.75, were very juicy and had a tendency to break up in the pitter. This is in contrast to the other Evans tree. It was grown from a root sucker from an Evans on its own rootstock that I had purchased from St. Lawrence Nursery many years ago. Although this tree produced slightly less fruit by weight, the brix was slightly higher at 12, the cherries were firmer and held their shape through the pitting process, and there appeared to be fewer split cherries to cull on the tree. It seems apparent that each rootstock had a different response to the exceedingly wet conditions.

We had a very successful early fruit tasting at Begich Middle School on September 11. It was estimated that it was attended by around 130 people. In addition to some apples and cherries, I brought some of the above kiwi fruits. All that was left was a pile of stems! The tasting was quite a testament to our membership that every table was filled with examples of what was being harvested at the time.

Our final late apple/fruit tasting will be on Saturday, October 1, hosted by Mark Oathout at [Mid Valley Greenhouse](#) in Wasilla from 2:00 – 3:30 pm. The event is free and open to the public. Please invite your friends and neighbors to sample some of the excellent fruit being grown locally.

Bring samples of your apples and any other fruits that you are picking. Those bringing fruit should arrive between 1:30 and 2:00 pm to set your fruit out. There will be numbered paper plates for you to write the variety, your name, and general growing location before putting your fruit on the plate. If bringing apples, please bring 2-3 large apples, 4-5 medium apples, or 6-9 small crabs. Please note on the plate if the fruit was grown in a greenhouse or high tunnel.

Some knives will be provided, but things move faster if you have your own jack knife or paring knife. Tasters (you!) are requested to make thin wedges/slices from pole to pole of the apples when sampling. You will be provided a rating sheet to rate each apple and make notes. When you have finished tasting, your sheet will be recorded and given back to you to take home. We will have pens, but it is helpful if you bring something to write with and a clip board. Results from both tastings will eventually be posted on the [APFGA website](#) under the “Research” tab.

Finally, member Debbie Hinchey has a used [chipper/shredder for sale](#). Just click the link to learn more. Also, please [email me](#) your rootstock request for spring if you haven’t already.

All the best,

Mark Wolbers
President, APFGA