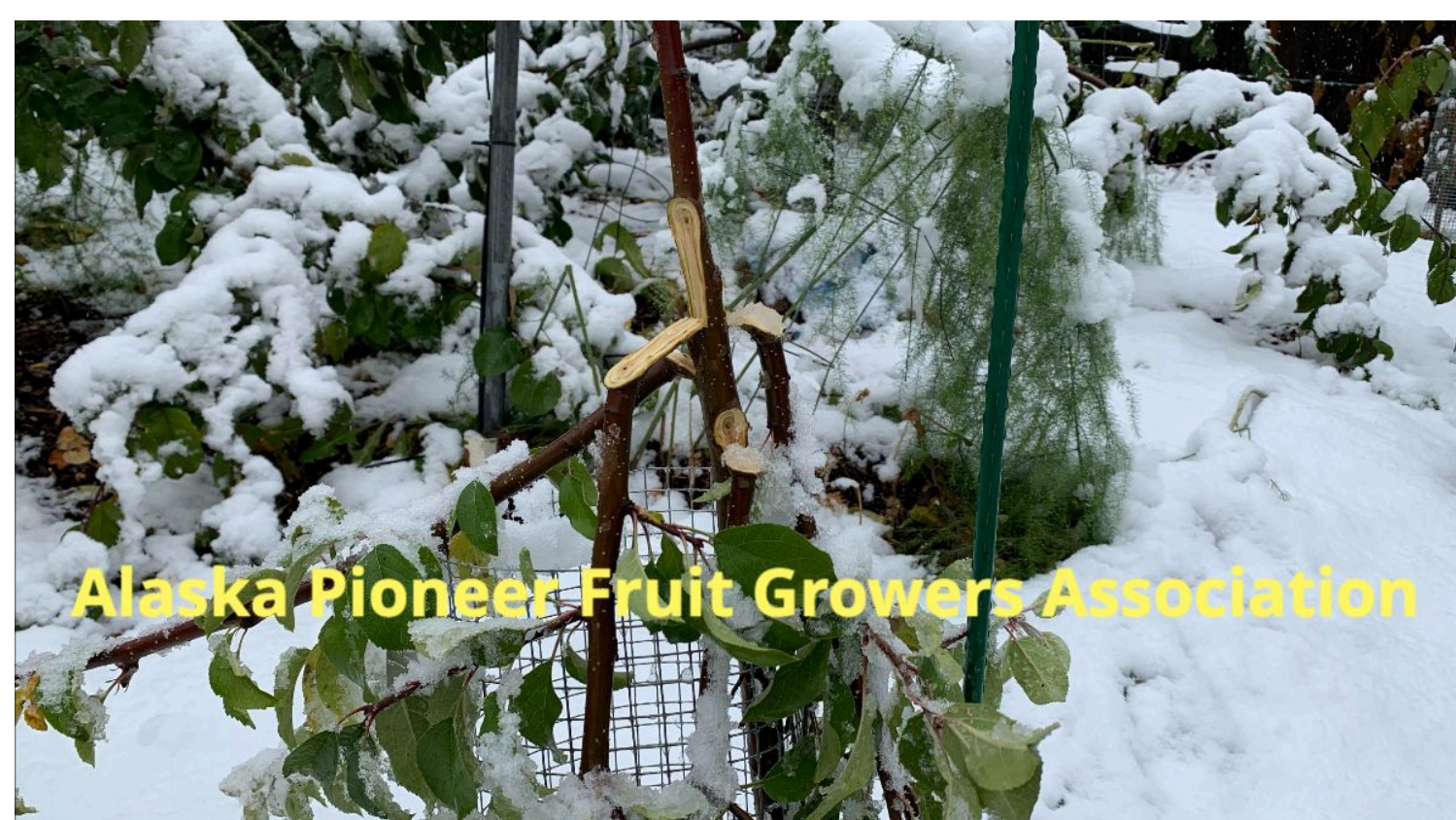


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Hello Fruit Growers!

Well, Mother Nature can be cruel. It's one thing to have an early hard freeze, but to follow it up with a heavy wet snow was just adding insult to injury! So, I am sending this newsletter out early since many of you in Southcentral Alaska may have tree injuries to deal with.

Many of you were probably like me and working long hours earlier this week to beat the cold. I harvested the remaining Evans cherries (Average Brix 13) on Monday. This was followed by picking all of the apples and any other remaining fruit on Tuesday. Wednesday morning the temperature in East Anchorage was 22 degrees.

Today, Friday morning, Southcentral Alaska awoke to a heavy blanket of wet snow that had fallen during the night. It was as though nature tried to crush the garden and orchard into two dimensions. With the snow coming before any leaves had dropped, most plants were just overwhelmed by the weight. I went around and gently shook off the snow from every plant. Some, just bent over. Others, like a number of raspberry canes, and various tree limbs were not so lucky.

Our fruit trees however, fared pretty well since they had been managed and pruned for good crotch angles. Narrow crotches are the ones that tend to break under load. But, it is obvious that some varieties do better than others. In the photo above, you see my young William's Pride apple with every first scaffold branch broken.

You can mend a broken branch, provided you take action right away, the wood is healthy, it has a good crotch angle worthy of saving, and you have a way to support the branch and hold the wound tight until it heals. On my young tree, the branches broke right at the top of the collar and then peeled down and were still attached with a flap of bark. If this had been a mature tree, I might have been able to support the broken branch by tying it to a branch above it. Once the branch is supported, you can tie it back to the trunk, working to get the branch compressed tightly into the socket. Cable ties work well and be cinched tight, and I have even seen mechanical fasteners used on large limbs for permanent support.

In my situation, I was hoping to preserve my scaffold limbs, but had no way to support the limbs and was afraid that I wouldn't be able to compress the wound and keep it from moving. There was no lip on the top of the break to get a cable tie around, and with the weight of the branch I envisioned the top of the wound opening and closing as the branch moved. I might have been able to put a small screw into the top of the branch to use to pull the top of the wound tight, but I decided instead to remove the weight by cutting the branches. (photo below)



Although, the branches held the first flower buds that the tree has produced, I would not have allowed any fruit to set anyways, since the limbs should not be under any load while healing for a year. So, in my case I wasn't sacrificing much in order to hopefully guarantee a good solid mend. I left a 4-inch stub which should allow new branches to grow. By the time they are mature enough to fruit, the wound should be well mended. Had this been a mature tree, I would have tried to keep more or most of the limb.

With the weight of the limb removed, it was easy to tightly bind the branches to the trunk. As in grafting, I used parafilm tape to wrap and seal the wounds making sure of a tight fit. I then used [linerless rubber splicing tape](#) for extra support and compression of the wound.

The central leader of my young tree was protected because it was tied off to a stake. I recommend staking young trees during fall fruiting and winter because of the danger that the weight of fruit and snow brings to the tree. If your young tree wasn't staked and the central leader bent or fractured, this too can be mended but may require a splint to support it while it heals. In the worst-case scenario, if you aren't successful mending the tree, you can later simply cut the stem off above a bud and let it grow a new leader.

So, if nothing else, hopefully I have encouraged you to try mending some broken branches. You really don't have anything to lose.



In other news, we successfully threaded the weather forecast and held an outdoor apple tasting last Saturday on what was a stunning day (photo above). Many thanks to Rayna Swanson, Sabrina Shaw, Doug and Carol Damberg, Randy Arduser, and Mark Findlay for bringing tables and helping out. Although it wasn't the size of a non-pandemic tasting, everyone who attended seemed to enjoy the chance to try some apples. Thank you to Mark Findlay who compiled and tallied the score sheets. You can click the link to view the results of the [2021 Apple Tasting](#).

All the best,

Mark Wolbers
President, APFGA