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Hello Fruit Growers!

I am always impressed by what everyone grows here in Alaska despite what the weather sends our way. Our two end-of-season fruit tasting events were well attended and boasted an array of apples, plums, cherries, blueberries, gooseberries and even a few raspberries. Due to croploads, the apple pressing event only processed about one ton of apples this year for our members. Although the sugar level (brix) was not as high as in years past, the juice was still yummy.

This season is essentially over at this point unless you are growing in a high tunnel or greenhouse. In Southcentral Alaska, temperatures are trending down (low today 22° F in our orchard) and with them a dwindling number of growing degree days (GDD). Each week of September saw a decline in GDDs with only 40 GDD/42° gained last week. Below is a comparison of the Growing Degree Days (GDD) for the past month and our totals to date compared with the previous two years at our orchard in East Anchorage.

Year:	September:	Total :
2021	250 GDD/42°	2420 GDD/42°
2022	309 GDD/42°	2639 GDD/42°
2023	260 GDD/42°	2340 GDD/42°

In Southcentral Alaska, this was a record summer for cloud cover and rain during the entire season. It followed last year, which saw nothing but rain from mid-July until mid-October. However, these two consecutive years of poor conditions have taught me a useful lesson concerning apple thinning.

Because last year I had allowed a normal fruit set, the saturated heavy soils and lack of sun led to a kind of biennial bearing, resulting in a lack of flower buds this year. Some trees consequently only had a couple of flowers, but they produced a few beautiful and large apples. My take-away from this experience is that I should thin every year for the likely possibility of a wet second-half of the season. If I leave fewer apples than normal, then my trees might have a better chance of setting return bloom even if the weather goes wet as it often does. And, I will crop a better sized apple.

Since many apple trees had little fruit this season, it can be expected that they will flower profusely next spring. This will mean that pruning and thinning next season will take on an even greater importance in order to prevent the trees from falling into an ongoing cycle of biennial bearing.

In preparation for winter, remember to tie young trees to stakes and make sure you have rodent guards or screens in place. It is imperative that you have your trees protected from every possible animal that will find them tasty. This includes moose, rabbits, porcupines, and voles. If you had problems with fungal diseases this season, then be sure to rake and bag any fallen leaves or fruit and dispose of it in the trash. Do not put it in your compost.

The berry plants seemed to shrug off the constant rain. Another 200 GDDs would have been nice to finish off more of the blueberries. But production was good. We had very large Arctic Kiwi berries this year. (Photo above: September Sun) Also good crops of strawberries, raspberries, black currants and gooseberries. The bumper crop of gooseberries led me to start a batch of white wine that is interestingly tinged with a lovely pink hue. I give much of the credit for the berry crops to our native bumblebees who were still at work on September 29! (photo below)



I recommend that you wait to cut out this year's fruiting canes (floricanes) on your raspberries until spring. This allows the plants to better sequester resources for next season. Wait to head red and yellow raspberries until April as well. However, purple raspberry laterals should be headed back to 6 inches now.

Strawberries should be mulched if you are growing day neutrals or June bearers that aren't super hardy. We grow the June bearer Cavendish which is perfectly hardy without mulching in the open ground. However, the same cultivar in raised beds needs mulching. Everyone needs to be aware of their individual micro climate and growing conditions. When in doubt, mulch the strawberries, but wait until they are fully dormant and daytime temperatures are staying below 40° F.

Joe Thomas is considering bringing in an order of Krymsk 86 root stock for grafting peach and nectarines for use in his high tunnels. If there are any other high tunnel growers interested in participating in his order, click the link to [email Joe](#).

As for the club rootstock order for spring 2024, we have secured orders for everything except Harbin Pear and Manchurian Apricot. These only appear to be available in conservation grade plants, which means they are small (18-24"). The Board will decide next week whether to order these or not. In the past, many of the rootstock in this size that we ordered were too small to graft and had to be grown for another year before grafting.

Last year, it appears our supplier of pear rootstock sent us the wrong rootstock and we failed to catch the error. Consequently, the Board is considering a refund or credit for the 16 members who ordered pear rootstock for 2023.

Speaking of the Board, there will be an [APFGA Board of Directors meeting](#) next Wednesday, October 11, at 7:00 pm on Zoom. Members are always welcome to attend. Click the links for the full [Zoom invitation](#), last meeting [minutes](#), and [agenda](#).

On the second Thursday of each November at the annual membership meeting, we hold elections for the board member seats that are up for renewal. Your Board is tasked with serving our members (you) through the various activities that we engage in each year. This includes a Winter Speaker Series, Pruning Workshop, Grafting Workshop, Top-working Workshop, Summer Tours, Apple Pressings, and Fruit Tastings. These events only happen because some of you volunteer to serve on the board to help organize and make these activities possible. Please [email me](#) if you would consider serving on the board and standing for election or would like more information.

Lastly, we will have an in-person social meeting to give members in the Anchorage/Mat-Su area a chance to talk with each other and to share information and/or ask questions. Fred Deiser has agreed to start the conversation by sharing his research and efforts regarding growing plums, and the impact of grafting interstems for short-season growers (us!). The conversations will happen on Saturday, October 28, at 1:00 pm at the Anchorage [Lidia Selkregg Chalet](#) in Russian Jack Park. Formal wear is not required (hah!).

All the best,

Mark Wolbers
President, APFGA

