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Hello Fruit Growers!

Although it may seem like the shoveling will never end, keep in mind that our days are lengthening almost 6 minutes a day now. (Yay!) In the end, the sun will win and melt the snow around mid-April. So, although it may seem like winter is still upon us, spring is really just around the corner.

March is the month that marks the upcoming change of season. This month features the last installment of our winter speaker series. It is scheduled for Thursday, March 9, at 7:00 pm on Zoom. Our speaker this month is [Dr. Zach Miller](#) who is associate professor and superintendent of the Montana State University-Western Ag Research Center (WARC). He will share the research and work he and his colleagues are doing on cold hardy fruits. Their work is fairly relevant to us since they are at a high altitude that somewhat mimics the cold requirements needed here in Alaska. They exceed our seasonal growing degree day (GDD) average of 2500 GDD/°42, but their trials of small fruits and tree fruits often provide useful and interesting information for the Alaska grower.

To see Dr. Miller's presentation and [join the zoom meeting](#), just click the link on Thursday, March 9, at 7:00 pm Alaska Time. Or, click the following link for the [full Zoom invitation](#).

On Saturday, March 18 at 1:30 pm, we will hold a pruning workshop at [Boyer's Greenhouse](#) (click the link for directions). This is our first workshop of the season, and it is fun because it really feels like spring inside the greenhouse. We will take you through the basics of pruning established fruit trees and then we will work our way through the greenhouse practicing what we learned while pruning the rest of the trees. Bring your pruners and work gloves.

The end of March is when I like to do dormant pruning. Unfortunately, the deep snow pack may delay some of that work until snow shoes are no-longer required. The ideal is to complete the dormant pruning before the buds begin to swell. This isn't to say that you couldn't prune a bit later. But I am someone who likes to prune AND harvest [scion wood](#) at the same time. Scion wood needs to be collected while the trees are still fully dormant and the danger of really severe cold has passed. You need the scion wood to be dormant when you graft, otherwise the scion will bud out before it has healed to the rootstock. Without that connection, the scion (your graft) won't survive.

Cherries often come out of dormancy ahead of apples because they may have already met most of their somewhat lower [chill hour](#) requirement prior to the full onset of winter. So, when temperatures get above freezing in the spring, they are ready to go. An extreme case in point is the photo above (April 1, 2022) of a young Gold cherry last spring that was completely buried in snow from the time of the first snow in November until it emerged in the spring already with green tips!

The fall of 2021 in Anchorage if you remember, came to an abrupt end with 20° F temperatures in mid-September and then hovered between 30-45° F until the first snow and severe cold at the end of November. This allowed the plants to accumulate a hefty amount of chill hours before the real onset of consistent temperatures below 32°F. Apple buds in 2022 were already beginning to swell in the second week of April in Anchorage. This spring should not be quite as early from a chill hour standpoint, but you now understand why the safest bet is to harvest scion wood before April. (For more about hardiness, chill hours, and growing degree days, please see my presentation: [From Bud to Fruit: Surviving Cold – Requiring Heat.](#))

Increasing sun will mean warmer temperatures and the start of snow melt. The melting often causes a void to form between the snow-pack and the orchard floor. Use a hoe, or your foot or snow shoe, and collapse the snow around your tree guards/screens. Voles like to take the path of least resistance. Stomping down the snow around the plants that you want to protect is just one more way to keep them at bay. Of course, if your tree guards/screens are topped by the snow, it would be good to remove the snow around them. No need to give the critters easy access to a meal on your tree.

Should you find recent vole damage as the snow melts, and the tree is not completely girdled, you can often save the tree and prevent a permanent wound by immediately covering the chewed area with silicon. The silicon provides a covering that prevents the few remaining exposed cambium cells from drying out and dying. Overtime, these plant stem cells will differentiate and rebuild the phloem (bark) on the outside of the tree. The best practice, as Dan Elliot recommends, is to use white silicon because it will reflect sunlight. In a pinch, I have used clear silicon with good results as well.

The date of our annual grafting workshop is Saturday, April 15 at Anchorage Begich Middle School. The grafting workshop is where you pick up any rootstock orders, purchase rootstock, exchange scion wood, and learn to graft. We plan to set up at 11:00 am, have members bring scion wood at 11:30 am, and then fully open the workshop to members at noon. We will be done and out of the building at 3:00 pm. Board Member Doug Damberg is again organizing the grafting workshop and is putting out the call for volunteers to help. Some of the many tasks include helping with set-up, admission, grafting instruction, scion wood, rootstock distribution, and clean-up. If you are willing to help, please [email Doug](#).

Finally, our next meeting of the APFGA Board of Directors is by Zoom on Thursday, March 16, at 7:00 pm. Members are always welcome to attend the board meetings. The following are links to [join the meeting](#), the proposed [agenda](#), and [minutes](#) from the February 26, BOD meeting.

I look forward to seeing you on Zoom for Dr. Miller's presentation!

All the best,

Mark Wolbers
President, APFGA