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Hello Fruit Growers!

It is hard not to be excited by 14 hours of daylight, with sunshine that now feels decisively warm. As far as winters go, this past winter in Southcentral was very stable temperature-wise, with none of the periodic warm-ups that generally happen. The snow on the metal roof of our shed/greenhouse didn't slide off all winter until last Thursday. Every day the snow pack shrinks from the sun's warmth.

People often notice apple trees that have a few leaves still on them. An extreme example is our Sweet 16 apple (photo above) that was under a greenhouse cover until the beginning of winter in mid-October. This is a very late apple, and the sudden move to winter kept it from going through the normal sequence of events leading to leaf drop ([abscission](#)). Normally, trees will pick up temperature and light cues to begin remobilizing resources like Nitrogen in the leaves, and move them to the perennial parts of the tree. However, a rapid change to winter can freeze the leaves on the tree before they have a chance to complete remobilization and abscission. Luckily, this doesn't seem to harm the trees.

Unlike 2021-22, the steady cold from mid-October through spring has also delayed the accumulation of [chill hours](#). I am not seeing bud swell on cherries or apples, because the trees have not met their chill hour requirement and consequently will probably stay dormant for a while longer even if we get some weather in the 40's. What this means is that if you were unable to get to your trees to harvest scion wood because of the deep snow, the opportunity is still open. I would suspect that in Southcentral Alaska, you should be able to collect scion wood this year through the first two weeks of April or right up to the Grafting Workshop on April 15, provided the trees are not in a warm micro-climate.

Did you notice that great segue to the Grafting Workshop? How about the big hint to collect scion wood to bring to the workshop?

The grafting workshop is on Saturday, April 15 at [Begich Middle School](#) in East Anchorage. Members bringing scion wood to the workshop should arrive between 11:30 and Noon. The workshop opens to APFGA members at Noon, and then opens to the general public at 1:00 pm. The workshop closes at 2:30 pm, and we need to be cleaned up and out of the space by 3:00 pm. Email [Doug Damberg](#), if you would like to teach, help, or volunteer.

If you placed an order for rootstock, you will receive an email from me with the final pricing. Please pay and collect your order at the workshop between Noon and 2:30 pm. Otherwise email me to make other arrangements. For members who did not pre-order, (and the public) we do have apple and possibly a few plum and cherry rootstock available to purchase. However, at the workshop you will be limited to initially buying only two apple rootstock and one of any other rootstock that might be available. Then at 2:15 pm we will make available whatever is still unsold. We will also have parafilm grafting tape, metal plant tags, and spiral tree wraps for sale.

It is important that you contribute scion wood to the grafting workshop. All cultivars are welcome as long as you know the name. No "mystery" scions please. Please write the cultivar name on the bag, along with your name and general location. In addition to apple, we need plum, pear, apricot and cherry scions. Click the link for more on [harvesting and storing scion wood](#).

In our orchard I harvested scion wood and completed my initial dormant pruning while on snow shoes in the middle of March. Once the snow melts, which won't be long, I will go out again and finish pruning the stuff that was still under the snow. By that time, the young trees should be out of the snow and I can do training cuts on those to establish scaffolds or strengthen branches. With young whips, if they put on good growth the first year, I will head them back to around 32-36". This will stimulate buds to branch underneath the cut, while the top bud continues upward as the new leader. On two or three-year old trees, I will head back to a lower bud on any emerging scaffold branches that are thin and overly long to strengthen them in anticipation of the fruit that will follow in a year or so. When doing pruning or training cuts, this is also a good time to deploy [branch spreaders](#) to train branch angles to 60° if needed.



If you missed the pruning workshop in March, master fruit grower and former APFGA President, Dan Elliot will again be giving a pruning demonstration on Saturday, April 8, at 10:00 am at [Mid-Valley Greenhouse](#) in Wasilla. He will discuss pruning and training of fruit trees using some nursery stock. As you can see in the photo above, the event was well attended last year and was quite informative. You will leave with a clearer understanding of the issues regarding pruning and training to establish a healthy and productive structure for your trees!

Once the snow is gone, it is also a good idea to clean up your raspberries. If you are growing your raspberries on wire or in rows, remove last year's two-year old canes (the canes that fruited) and head back this year's fruiting canes to 3 feet to encourage laterals (depending on your grow system). If you grow purple raspberries and didn't head back laterals to 8" in the fall, do so now. I recommend that you tie your canes to wires as they grow. The winds that inevitably come later in the summer can damage your crop if they aren't tied securely. (See [Growing Raspberries in Wisconsin](#))

You might also consider getting stocked up for the growing season. Remember how I remind you to write the purchase date on any biological products you buy? Check the purchase date of your Bt ([Bacillus thuringiensis](#)). If it is more than 2 years old, it is best to replace it. You will need it when your haskaps (honeyberries) have finished blooming to control leaf-rollers. If you grow currants, then having [SpinosaD](#) ready is handy for dealing with the saw-fly larva that inevitably show up to defoliate our plants. If you have a number of trees and bushes, then it might be time to invest in a pump-up or electric backpack sprayer.

If you had insect or fungal problems in your fruit trees and bushes, then you might want to apply a spray of [copper](#) (anti-fungal) and/or [horticultural oil](#) (insecticide). Depending on the plant, copper can be phototoxic to green tissue, so to be safe, spray before green tip. If you want to spray trees with horticultural oil, do so in the morning on a warm day (above 40F) when there is time for the spray to dry and when there are no freezing temperatures 48 hours before or after spraying. Be sure to read labels for proper rates for both the copper and the oil for the timing of the spray. Do not spray as a combination spray after green tip is observable as there may be some phototoxicity from the copper, especially in sweet cherries. Don't spray within 14 days of using a sulfur product. Don't spray if temperatures exceed 75 F.

Of course, the best offense is a good defense when it comes to preventing fungal problems around your fruit plants. Once the snow is gone, practice good orchard sanitation. Remove and dispose of any mummified fruits on your plants or the ground. They can harbor fungal spores that can infect your plants. If you had a tree with fungal issues, then I also recommend that you rake, remove, and dispose of any leaves or cuttings under the tree.

In the category of miscellaneous fruit news, I received an email from Bernie Nikolai in Edmonton, Canada, who shared his experiments with [geo-thermal holes](#) for over-wintering more tender cultivars. Interesting stuff for those who live in really cold regions. I also recently read a book titled "[Hardy Apples, Growing Apples in Cold Climates](#)" by Bob Osborne. This is a relatively new book (2022) that provides a good introduction to apple growing for those of us in Zone 4, 3, and 2. It has good pictures, but the reader must keep in mind their own season length when looking at the recommended cultivars. Alaska has a shorter season than many lower latitude areas that experience severe cold.

In the upcoming events category, there will be two Top-Working Workshops in early May. One at Mid-Valley Greenhouse in Wasilla on Saturday, May 6 at 10:00 am led by Dan Elliot. And then on Saturday, May 13, at 2:00 pm, I will lead a workshop in Anchorage, location TBA.

Finally, this week Thursday, April 6 at 7:00 pm, a reminder that we will have a Board of Directors meeting to finalize plans for the grafting workshop. Members are always welcome to attend board meetings. Simply click the link at the date and time to [join the Zoom meeting](#). Here are links to the [proposed agenda](#), and the [past minutes](#).

All the best,

Mark Wolbers
President, APFGA