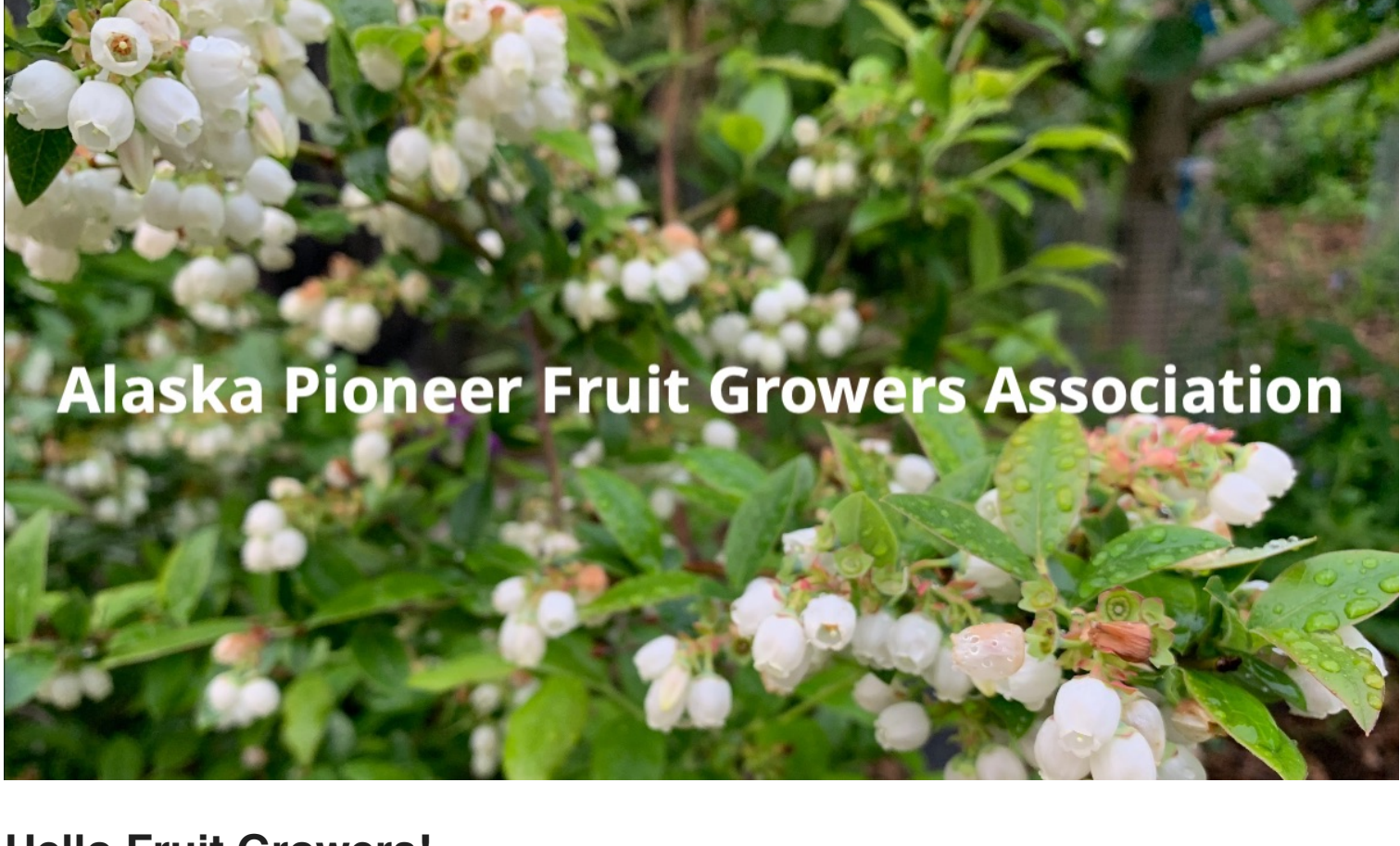


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Hello Fruit Growers!

Is summer here yet, or did I already miss it? My confusion stems from the fact that Southcentral Alaska has been uncharacteristically dominated by cool, wet weather so far. It is as if we skipped May and June, and went directly to a perpetual August. The weather folks claim we have exited the La Niña weather pattern and are headed for an El Niño pattern. All I know is that this is not how summer has unfolded for us over the last decade.

Growing Degree Day (GDD) accumulation has been slow. Below is a three-year comparison of the GDD/42° amounts for the month of June.

2021: 540 GDD 2022: 672 GDD 2023: 482 GDD

Below are the GDD totals for the season to date as of July 1, for the past three years.

2021: 990 GDD 2022: 1172 GDD 2023: 800 GDD

Keep in mind that even our earliest apples need around 2000 GDD/42° to ripen while Prairie Magic and Carroll require 2350 GDD/42°. If we get a radiative hard freeze in mid-September like what happened two years ago, we may struggle to get to 2200 GDD.

As you can see from our GDD totals, we are substantially behind where we have been over the last couple of years. In April, I was asked to give a talk at the Alaska Society of American Foresters 2023 Annual Meeting on the topic of climate change and the future of commercial tree fruit growing in Alaska. The inference of the topic was that global warming would simply shift agricultural grow points Northward. Using weather data, I showed how global warming was not a predictable asset even in Alaska. Climate change simply makes weather more undependable and extreme, both qualities that make any potential commercial enterprise financially more fraught with risk. To counter the risks, one would need to grow everything under cover, making the fruit price non-competitive with outside sources. I think our recent weather has made my point.

Regardless of the weather, there are still things to do. If your fruit trees are getting too tall, now is a good time to top them, preferably to a non-vigorous lateral or an appropriate leaf. The advantage of doing this now after bloom, is that it doesn't cause the surge of regrowth that will happen if you top the tree during dormant pruning.

Next, it is time to thin apples to get the best size of fruit. Of course, this applies to regular apples and not most crab apples, unless those trees have biennial tendencies. Before you just assume the king blossom fruitlet is the best and cut the rest, first gently pull away the old blossoms if they are still clumped on the tree. The weather made the blossom clusters ideal habitat for leaf rollers this year, so check the fruitlets for any damage and save the best one. Remove any rolled leaves and squish the caterpillar inside. (see bottom right photo below)

Make sure you leave an appropriate number of apples that the branch can support. I generally space large apples 6-9 inches apart, and medium apples 4-6" apart. But if the branch is young, I may only keep a couple of apples towards the center of the tree where the branch is stronger. Better to have less fruit this year, than to have the set-back of losing an entire over-weighted branch. On trees that have reduced bloom, it is fine to keep more than one fruit in cluster.

Haskaps (honeyberries) need to be netted unless you want to feed the birds. I was trimming our bushes so that they would fit under the nets and found wooly aphids on the underside of some of the new shoots. (Top right photo below) This was a first for me and also for Alexandria Wenninger, our Anchorage UAF Extension Entomologist. She recommended wiping them off or using an insecticidal soap or neem oil. In my case, they were pruned out anyway.

I also scouted my first black currant midge larvae on June 19. If you find new tip growth that looks curled up (lower left photo below), pick it and gently open it up and you will see the larvae inside. (Top left photo) Joey Slowik (Integrated Pest Management) at the Mat-Su UAF Cooperative Extension Service shared that he thinks the strain Bt israelensis may prove effective, however I haven't found a liquid version of the product on the market. For now, I am spraying Spinosad on a weekly schedule (or more with the rain) and picking any infested plant tips. Speaking of Spinosad, I recommend that you have some on hand for when the sawfly larvae emerge on the currants and gooseberries.

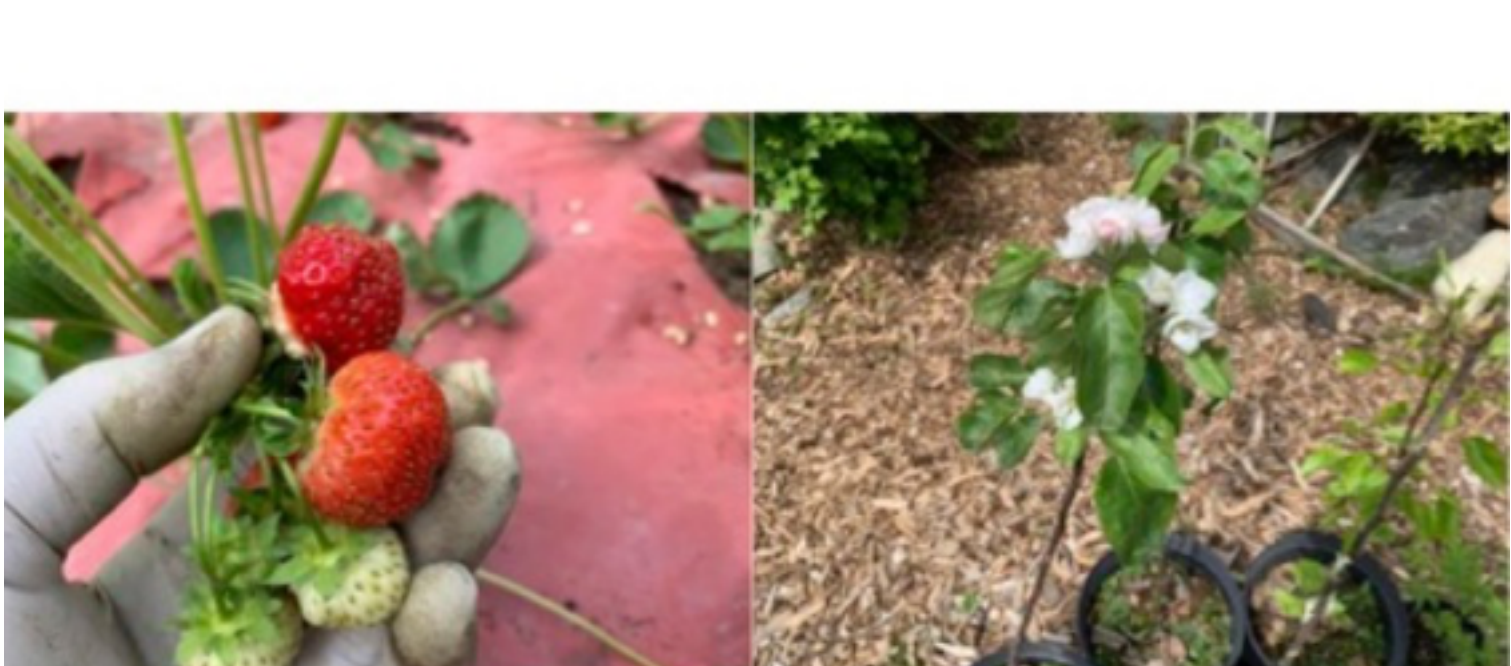
In our nursery of newly grafted and young plants, I often see the new shoots of apples and cherries eaten by an unseen insect. They are like ghosts, and I hardly ever catch an insect on the plant, despite the frequent damage. The bottom middle photo is of an insect in the lygus family that I saw on a young cherry leaf. He may not be the culprit, or is he? In any case, Spinosad is my "Tiger Balm" for chewing insect problems.



In other news, blueberries are in bloom or wrapping up. Photo at the top is Northblue, which blossomed first in our orchard. It was followed one week later by Chippewa, and then a week later by Northland, a variety we are testing. Hopefully, the pollinators have been able to do their job despite the cool weather. As I mentioned in the June Newsletter, bloom is the time to give blueberries their first shot of fertilizer.

Our early June bearer strawberries (Annapolis) that have been in a low tunnel are just coming on. (Left photo below) Raspberries and arctic kiwis are also just starting to bloom. Cherry bloom is just abating and setting fruit. Still a bit early to say how the fruit set is for all the cherries or if the cold interfered with the pollinators.

Last year I purchased three different Geneva rootstocks to trial. I grafted all of them with Prairie Magic. They put on impressive growth last season (G.890 29"), and they were left in pots above ground with no snow cover against the North side of our house over winter (-15° F). All three, G.935, G.969 and G.890 survived. Steve and Sarah Masterman in Fairbanks planted G.969 and G.890 last fall, and they survived. So, they have passed the initial hardness tests. After heading the G.890, it turned out to actually have 3 sets of flower buds on the first year's growth (right photo below) so it would seem to be precocious!



Based on what I have witnessed so far, and reviewed in the research literature, I am recommending G.890 for field trial by members next year. This is an impressive clonal semi-dwarf hybrid from a cross of Robusta 5 x Ottawa 3, and is about 55 to 65 percent the size of the seedling baccata rootstock we have been using. It is resistant to fire blight (*Erwinia amylovora*), crown rot (*Phytophthora* spp.), woolly apple aphid, and test results showed it to be the most cold hardy of the Geneva series (-40° F). Unlike many dwarfing rootstock, G.890 can be planted as a freestanding tree and achieves a high colonization by mycorrhizal fungi. It is considered one of the best rootstocks for orchards under organic management.

This is a very popular rootstock with commercial growers, and Steve Cummins at Cummins Nursery has asked how many we would want to have him pencil us in for. I told him I would poll the membership and give him an estimated order by mid-July. Without shipping the price would be approximately \$4.50 for small orders (1-24) and falls to around \$3 each for orders over 300. So, price will depend upon how many rootstock members are willing to test.

If you are willing to trial the G.890 please submit your 2024 rootstock request by July 10. If you are not interested in trying the G.890, you can wait until August to submit your order. We will still have baccata available if that is your wish, but here is why I would encourage you to try G.890. Unlike seedling baccata, every G.890 is the same. There is no guessing about vigor, hardness, etc. You will have fruit sooner, and it will not be as difficult to control the size of the tree when mature. Most importantly, by participating in the trial you will advance the knowledge of the club! Just click the link to email me your [2024 rootstock request](#).

If anyone is considering a high-density planting on wire, or espalier, please contact me for rootstock suggestions. If you are interested in Krymsk 1 plum rootstock, please submit your request by July 10, as well.

As for Pear rootstock, we will attempt to secure Pyrus Ussuriensis (Harbin), but will also offer OHxF97. The OHxF97 is the pear rootstock that Bob Purvis recommends, Fedco uses, and Bernie Nickolai (Edmonton, Canada) says survives his winters. It is fully compatible with European pear cultivars whereas it is recommended with Harbin that you graft an inter-stem of Summercrisp before grafting European pears. Harbin flowers earlier which is considered a disadvantage in the lower 48, but that is an advantage in a short season like Alaska. However, if hardness is a concern, the Harbin is harder than the OHxF97. If you are interested in the OHxF97, please submit your [rootstock request](#) by July 10. Pricing is similar to the Geneva apple rootstock.

On Saturday, July 22, you are invited to tour our garden/orchard at 2:00 pm. The last time Miok and I hosted a tour for the club was before the pandemic. I recall the weather was a bit sketchy, but a good time was had in our garage after a brief tour, sampling fruit, juice and other tasty treats that members brought to share. Click the link for [directions to our house](#). There is an empty gravel lot across the street for parking.

Then, on Saturday, August 11, Dan and Nancy Moore have invited the club for a potluck barbeque and orchard tour starting at 11:00 am at their [Fire Apple Orchard](#) in Big Lake. Dan says they will supply the brats on the grill with all the trimmings and drinks.

Our club has grown quite a bit over the past few years. With members in Kodiak to Fairbanks and beyond, I recognize that not everyone can attend a tour in the Valley or Anchorage. I was thrilled last month that Steve and Sarah Masterman held a get-together for fruit growers in the Fairbanks area, and it would be great to have an event on the Peninsula sometime. In the meantime, I did make a short video tour of our place earlier in June. Just click the link for a [virtual tour of Chez Wolbers](#) if you are unable to come in person later this month.

All the best,

Mark Wolbers
President, APFGA

