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Hello Fruit Growers!

The season in Southcentral Alaska has been dominated by clouds and rain. Then, around the beginning of August we had two weeks of summer. Those two weeks of sun caused the light green new growth to burst forth on the Prairie Magic whip grafted this spring shown in the photo above. It would have been nice to have had more than two weeks of summer, but that’s how the cookie crumbles!

Those two weeks of sun also gave a boost to our Growing Degree Day totals in our orchard and surprisingly made August the warmest month of the summer (ouch!). 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:	August:	Total :
2021	545 GDD/42°	2170 GDD/42°
2022	495 GDD/42°	2330 GDD/42°
2023	645 GDD/42°	2080 GDD/42°

Now, you may be wondering how you might compare the GDDs at your location to those I report. Per my request, Alaska Climate Specialist Rick Thoman has kindly provided a [graph of GDDs](#) at airport locations on the road system. Everywhere in Alaska is a micro climate. For example, GDDs in Anchorage start low by the water at the International Airport, increase a bit inland at Merrill Field, and go up even more as you move farther from the ocean.

Our urban orchard is two miles inland from Merrill field and has the additional advantage of being situated on a Southwestern facing slope. Consequently, the GDDs I report are comparable to those reported at the Palmer airport. The fruit photos in the newsletters are current for our location and can also help you judge where you fall in regards to GDDs and fruit development. However, you could only precisely know your own individual micro climate by installing a temperature logger. [Email me](#) if you would like equipment suggestions.



Despite the sun in the beginning of the month, the wet weather returned and began by dumping 1.75” of rain here around August 16. This caused swell cracking (side splits) on Carmine Jewel and even Romeo (photo TL) and Juliet cherries even though most were not close to being ripe. (Note: less swell splits on Juliet grafted on P. maackii) Heavy rains continued the following week and the month closed out with two days of high winds from the remnants of tropical storm Damry.

The romance cherries are now developed enough (2000 GDD/42°) that they will be prone to cracking on their tops and bottoms from water sitting on the outside of the cherry. If it continues to be rainy, your choice is to cull splits between the rains in the hope of higher sugar levels, or to pick them as they are. If you forgot to put up yellow jacket traps, then be careful picking split cherries as they may very well have a wasp on them! Evans cherries, as usual, mostly shrug off the wet weather and can continue to hang for increased sweetness.

You should have harvested black currants (photo TR: Swedish Black) and begun to harvest blueberries (photo LL: Northblue). Harvest of raspberries continues and gooseberries (photo LR: Hinnomaki Red) are coming ripe.



The high winds dropped a lot of unripe apples, but Sunday I picked our first ripe Golden Uralian apple (photo above). If you have early apples like Golden Uralian, Yellow Transparent, or Norland, keep an eye on them as they are or soon will be ready. Return bloom in our orchard was poor this spring, so I left more apples on the Uralian tree than I would normally, knowing I would be relying on the tree for cider this year.

That was my subtle segue to announce that we will hold an apple pressing for members on Saturday, September 16, at Mid Valley Greenhouse in Wasilla. APFGA Board Director Doug Damberg is organizing the apple pressings. If you are willing to volunteer and help at the apple pressings, please [email Doug](#). It is a bit of work, but fun tasting everyone’s apple juice.

Apples can be picked when ripe and held, if necessary, until the pressing. The cooler the storage, the better. Apples that have gone soft but not rotten are fine for pressing. For those that want to press Yellow Transparent, I recommend that you mix your buckets of apples with a firmer variety so that they grind and press better. The fresh juice freezes well if you want to have juice for drinking later in the year.

Because of our season in Southcentral, the apples, if you have them, may be less than prime for pressing. If your juice is too tart, remember that you can easily mix it with some of the banal overly-sweet honeycrisp cider sold in the supermarkets to make a delicious juice.

Should demand for pressing apples be greater than expected, we can expand the pressing schedule into Sunday, but we hope to accommodate everyone on Saturday. More information, including sign-up information, will arrive in your mailbox next week around September 10.

We also have two apple/fruit tastings coming up. Both tastings are free and open to the public. So, feel free to invite your friends to come discover the apple and fruit varieties that they want to grow or graft at the spring grafting workshop!

The dates are:

Saturday, September 23: Anchorage Apple/Fruit Tasting, Anchorage Begich Middle School 1:00-2:30 pm

Saturday, September 30: Valley Apple/Fruit Tasting, Mid-Valley Greenhouse, Wasilla 2:00-3:30 pm

APFGA Board Director Val Glooschenko is organizing the tastings. More information will hit your mailbox around September 17, along with a request for you to bring samples of your apples and fruit to the events. Please email Val should you have any questions.

With the smell of cranberries in the woods, it is only appropriate to remind everyone to have rodent screening or tree wraps in place before freeze up. Those who paint their trunks with white latex paint claim it discourages voles in addition to preventing spring sun scald. I use ½" wire cloth and put a 2 ft high cylinder around each tree. Push the bottom of your guard an inch or two into the soil so voles are not able to find your tree when burrowing under the snow. For young trees, it can be good insurance to tie them to a stake during winter to prevent snow-load from bending them over or breaking the leader. Hopefully, our first snow doesn’t come until the leaves are off the trees. But, if the first snow comes before that, or is a wet/heavy snow, then be prepared to knock the snow off of your younger trees to prevent limb breakage.

We will have an APFGA Board of Directors meeting on Thursday, September 21, at 7:00 pm on Zoom. Members are welcome to attend by clicking the [Zoom link](#). Here are the links to the proposed [agenda](#), previous meeting minutes, and the full [Zoom invitation](#) if needed.

One of the agenda items is to prepare for the November 9 annual membership meeting. Each November, three or four of the seven board of director seats are up for renewal or replacement. Because our 300+ members are located from Fairbanks to Homer and beyond, we will hold the meeting on Zoom. There will likely be openings, so if you are interested in serving on the board, please email me no later than October 12, so that I can set up a poll for the membership to vote on in November. Board meetings are on Zoom, so you don’t need to live in Anchorage to serve on the board. Matter of fact, it might be good to have a board member from Fairbanks or the Peninsula to help organize events in those locations. Because we will hold our meeting and vote on Zoom, nominations from “the floor” are difficult to handle, thus the call for nominations before the meeting.

Finally, if you haven’t already, please send me your [rootstock request](#) for spring 2024 now. This is the best way to guarantee that you will get what you want or need for grafting next season. The club submits rootstock orders in August and mid-September for the following spring. We try to anticipate what will be needed, but if you don’t let us know, then you get whatever is available.

All the best,

Mark Wolbers
President, APFGA

