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Hello Fruit Growers!

In Southcentral Alaska, the growing season persisted until October 14, when clear skies allowed nighttime temperatures to fall to the low 20's. I had finished removing any remaining apples two days prior in anticipation of the cold. Those two weeks of October contributed only 50 [Growing Degree Days](#) (GDD/42°) which was insignificant regarding fruit development. Any ripening of the fruit was likely being driven by time and internal processes, not temperature.

GDD accrual really slows by the end of September. Unless you are growing in a greenhouse, there simply isn't the sun/heat for much additional fruit development. Instead, I suspect the lingering above-freezing-temperatures are simply going into the tree's [chill hour](#) bank since they are already headed towards dormancy at that point.

With the above in mind, it seems prudent to select cultivars in South Central that have the potential to ripen by September 21 in their respective microclimates. Altitude, water proximity, and land/sun orientation can all affect the accumulation of GDDs. This is why I have been a vocal advocate that folks invest in temperature loggers. Among other things, a temperature logger provides the information to determine what cultivars have a reasonable chance of ripening. We know how many GDDs are required for many fruits and cultivars. What cultivars work for me will be different from what works for someone else because they accumulate a different amount of GDDs. A temperature logger would make a fantastic holiday gift for an avid and curious grower. [Email me](#) if you would like suggestions regarding equipment/costs.

The end dates and total GDDs for the past four seasons at our orchard in East Anchorage are as follows:

Year:	End Date:	Season Total:
2024	10.14.24	2340 GDD/42°
2023	10.1.24	2365 GDD/42°
2022	10.13.24	2725 GDD/42°
2021	9.22.24	2420 GDD/42°

This season, we successfully cropped the following apple cultivars. The cultivars are listed in ripening order with approximate GDD amounts for harvest:

Golden Uralian (2100-2200 GDD/42°)  
Prairie Magic (2200 -2300 GDD/42°)  
Ft. Mac/Mac  
Carroll  
Altiaski Sweet  
Whitney  
Duchess  
Lee 27  
State Fair (2300 - 2500 GDD/42°)  
Sunrise  
Simonet  
Red Astrachan  
Prairie Sensation

I do not currently grow the common early ripening cultivars Parkland, Norland, Rescue, Yellow Transparent, or Trailman. Some apples, such as Whitney and Altiaski Sweet did not fully ripen on the North side of the tree in time for the last pressing on September 28. Not all apples were fully ripe as determined by seed color. However, they were fine to harvest for extended storage and fresh eating. Brix amounts for a number of the cultivars were recorded at the first tasting on September 21. Thanks to efforts of Mark Findlay, the results for both tasting events are available on the [website](#) under the “Research” tab.



We had a great turnout for the second tasting event on October 5, at MidValley Greenhouse. We had over 50 apple cultivars and a number of greenhouse grown selections. Mark and Sharmin Oathout were, as usual, fantastic hosts with helping with the event and making things run smoothly. We encouraged members to bring some tasty treats and a number of folks really liked Frankie Shillington's Pepper Relish. Just click the link if you would like the [recipe](#).

The big storm that moved through the state during the week of October 20, brought record flooding to Kotzebue, record precipitation (2") in Fairbanks that accumulated as slush, and high winds in Southcentral. The high winds helped to strip some of the leaves from the trees. The removal of leaves was a positive for our region from what was a destructive storm. Accumulation of snow on branches that still have leaves can cause limb breakage.

The next storm system on October 28, brought the first significant snowfall of 5" of wet snow to our orchard. Fortunately, we have the leaders of our young trees tied to their stakes to prevent them being bent over from the snow. This was followed by another storm on Halloween that dropped another 6" of snow. If the snow stays, it should provide good insulation for the ground. Remember to pack down the snow around trees and plants to discourage the voles from tunneling to them. With snow cover, the ground temperature in our orchard at 6" is 38.75°F.

Last year Cultiva donated a case of [Parka](#) for members to try on cherries. Parka is a spray-on coating that helps to prevent cracking from water sitting or hanging on the exterior of the cherry. This was not a good test year, as the spring weather resulted in only 10% of a normal crop. However, I still applied the product to what fruit there was. The results were promising in that there were hardly any splits on the top or bottoms of the cherries which is where you find cracking from water adhesion. Of course, this did not prevent the Romance cherries from side splitting due to internal water uptake after 2000 GDD/42°. Nearly 2" of rain fell between September 9-12, at 2100 GDD/42° which of course split most of the Romance cherries. I try to wait to harvest because I want the higher sugar levels, but then more rain came than expected. On September 13, I picked our crop of split Romeo and Juliet cherries which had attained an average brix of 14°.

So, why the fuss over split cherries? In a normal weather year, cherries that split will invite unwanted pests, such as yellow jackets. Unless they are culled from the tree or bush immediately, they can also mold. And if you process them, it is mostly impossible to mechanically remove the seeds from split cherries. Because the cherry skin is broken, seeds often squirt to the side and are not pushed out by the pitter. From a commercial standpoint split cherries are a loss. From a home grower's standpoint, split cherries are a time-consuming annoyance. Again, if you had a temperature logger, AND reliable rain forecasts, you might be able to harvest before side splitting is eminent.

On Thursday, November 14, at 7:00 pm we will have our Annual Membership Meeting on Zoom. This is an important meeting! It is the one meeting of the year where membership participation is critical to the operation of the club. Every year, half of the club's board of director seats are up for election. This year that includes Val Glooschenko, Gary Masog, and myself. To enable club activities to continue uninterrupted, it is necessary to have a quorum of 32 members attend the Zoom meeting. So, please join us. Just click the link at 7:00 pm to [join the meeting](#). Here are the links to the proposed [agenda](#), past [minutes](#) and full [zoom invitation](#) if needed.

The week following the Annual Membership Meeting, we will hold a board meeting to decide what duties each of the board members will take on. Members are always welcome to attend. The Board of Directors meeting will take place on Zoom on Wednesday, November 20, at 7:00 PM. Click the link to [join the meeting](#). Here are the links to the proposed [agenda](#), past [minutes](#) and full [zoom invitation](#) if needed for the Board of Directors meeting.

Last, I am pleased to announce the slate of presenters for the 2024-25 APFGA Winter Speaker Series. The Winter Speaker Series takes place over four months on Zoom at 7:00 pm on the second Thursday of each month beginning in December. This year's presenters and topics will be:

December 12: Steven Edholm (of [Skillcult](#) fame) – Will discuss his ideas on how to improve cold hardy apples through breeding.

January 9: Joey Slowik (UAF IPM specialist) – Describes what Integrated Pest Management (IPM) is for Alaska and some of the common issues that he sees in a growing season.

February 13: Ray Saft – Will present on various poultry and their usefulness regarding growing fruit.

March 13: John McCormack (UAA) – Shares findings of his field research this past summer in identifying which insects are pollinating our apple trees.

I look forward to hearing our speakers and I am grateful that they are willing to share their time and knowledge! Hope to see you on Zoom for the Annual Membership Meeting on Thursday, November 14 at 7:00 pm.

All the best,

Mark Wolbers  
President, APFGA

