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Hello Fruit Growers!

In Southcentral Alaska the latter half of March has been dominated by daytime temperature in the 30's and 40's. Consequently, the snow has been melting. Unless we receive a late season snowstorm, we will fall short of breaking the season record for snow and may have to settle with having only the fourth highest amount on record!

I took advantage of the deep snowpack in mid-March to prune and collect scion wood. With my snowshoes on, it was easier to reach the upper part of the trees. The trees have been accumulating chill hours. Once they meet their chill hour requirements, a prolonged warm spell will cause the buds to begin to swell as the trees come out of dormancy. However, at this point, it is not too late to harvest scion wood for the grafting workshop on Saturday, April 13 at [Begich Middle School](#) in East Anchorage. Click the link for more information on collecting [scion wood](#) to share at the Grafting Workshop.

We rely on you (members) to contribute scion wood to the grafting workshop. All cultivars are welcome provided you know the name. No "mystery" scions or wood from cultivars still under plant patent (ex. Prairie Sensation, KinderKrisp). 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.

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 grafting, help, or volunteer.

If you placed an order for rootstock, you will receive an email from me with your total due. 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, as well as for 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.

When the snow is gone, it will be time to get your fruit trees ready for the upcoming season by practicing good orchard sanitation. Remove and dispose of any mummified fruits on your plants or the ground. They are breeding grounds for 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.

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). Copper and oil can be applied as a combination spray. Depending on the plant, copper can be phototoxic to green tissue, so spray before the buds show green tip. If you want to spray trees with horticultural oil, do so before green tip 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 and don't spray within 14 days of using a sulfur product.

Along with copper and oil, you might also check your supply of Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*) and Spinosad. Replace your Bt if it is more than 2 years old. (always write your purchase date on biologicals) You will need Bt 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.

You should also clean up your raspberries once the snow melts. 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. We always have a bout of windy weather just as the fruit is ripening. Having the canes tied securely keeps them from moving in the wind which can make jam out of your crop!

Many people don't prune Haskaps (Honeyberries). However, they too can benefit from dormant pruning. Pruning should always take the form of thinning cuts, not heading cuts (in other words, only make cuts at the origin point of a branch). The goals of pruning are to increase light and airflow into the center of the bush, rejuvenate old wood if needed, and remove branches that droop onto the ground. Haskaps need to be netted unless you intend to feed the birds. Order now if you need bird netting. I personally use netting from [Plantra](#).

The following are various links that may be of interest. Here is one on the history of the University of Minnesota [plum breeding program](#). Next, here is a link on John Bunker's work in [preserving heirloom apples](#) and the Heritage Apple Orchard. And finally, here is the link for [Part Two](#) of my notes from the International Fruit Tree Association annual meeting and orchard tours. The photo at the top is of a Yakima, Washington modern sweet cherry orchard planted in an upright fruiting offshoot (UFO) architecture. Notice how the trees are planted at a 45° angle and then multiple vertical shoots are tied and trained to the Y trellis.

While at the conference I had the opportunity to have lunch with a representative from Cultiva. This company produces [Parka](#), a spray composed of food grade ingredients used to strengthen the fruit cuticle and to prevent [cracking in cherries](#). After explaining our summer conditions, I asked him if he thought his product might make a difference. He offered to give me a case to try, but they couldn't ship it to Alaska. When looking at his business card I noticed the company was in Las Vegas. It just so happened that I was headed there in March for a music conference. So, arrangements were made, and I picked up five gallons of product to bring back home.

My intention is to demo Parka and to make it available for free for others to trial as well. Those interested in participating in the trial must meet the following criteria: have more than one tree or bush of the same cherry cultivar so you can leave one plant untreated as a control, own a backpack or pump-up sprayer, be willing to follow the recommended spray protocols and timings and, assess and report the results at the end of the season. [Email me](#) if you would like to take part in the trial.

APFGA activities start to ramp up during the next two months. Below is list of events coming up. Please mark your calendars.

1. Saturday, April 6, 2024, at 1:30 pm: Pruning/training demonstration of nursery trees in Wasilla at Midvalley Greenhouse with Dan Elliot
2. Saturday, April 13, 2024: Grafting Workshop, scion wood exchange, and rootstock pickup in Anchorage at Begich Middle School
3. Saturday, May 4, 2024, at 1:30 pm: Grafting/Topworking demonstration in Wasilla at Midvalley Greenhouse with Dan Elliot
4. Saturday, May 18, 2024, at 1:30 pm: Grafting/Topworking demonstration in Anchorage at Airport Heights Elementary with Mark Wolbers
5. Saturday, June 1, 2024, at 1:30 pm: Orchard tour at the Clark Orchard with Randy and Sonja Arduser.

About this time, we begin planning our summer orchard/garden tours. If you would be willing to host a tour, please email [Chris Hellmann](#) who is organizing this summer's events.

And finally, on Wednesday, April 17, at 7:00 pm, we will have a Board of Directors meeting to review and assess 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](#), and if needed, the full [Zoom Invitation](#).

All the best,

Mark Wolbers
President, APFGA

