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Hello Fruit Growers!

The weather finally became sunny in Southcentral Alaska around the middle of the month. Unfortunately, the high-pressure dome of air that cleared the clouds and rain did not arrive for bloom. The cool weather and intermittent showers were not helpful.

Ground temperature in our East Anchorage orchard has averaged 62° F at 6 inches this past week. Below is our year-to-date GDD accumulation compared with the previous three years.

2021: 990 GDD/42°  
2022: 1172 GDD/42°  
2023: 800 GDD/42°  
2024: 916 GDD/42°

Bloom was incredibly slow to unfold, and the cherry blossoms did not appreciate the rain nor the pace of plant growth. Even with cooler temperatures, cherry blossoms have a limited time window for pollination and a rain event can ruin the blossom's capacity to be pollinated. Consequently, cherry pollination and fruit set of the flowers in our orchard appears to be between 5 and 10 percent. (Ouch!) The shuck, the flower petal support ring, has been slow to fall off around late emerging fruit and may indicate nascent cherries that will abort. The few cherries that were able to successfully complete pollination early in bloom have gone through shuck-fall and are forming nicely with Evans now at 12 mm in size.

Although bloom was late (June 2-24) and unfolded in a painfully slow manner, apples seemed to carry on for the most part (photo above: Whitney flowers 6.12.24). The trees that had low return bloom/fruit set last year bloomed profusely. Hopefully, you have gone out and thinned the apples as discussed in the June newsletter. Now, go back and walk around the tree slowly to see what apples you have missed!

Below are photos of plant development in our East Anchorage orchard as of July 1, 2024. Prairie Magic apples are at 25 mm. Note the number of unpollinated flowers on the Evans cherry and the reduced fruit set on the Swedish Black Currant. Raspberries are currently in bloom while blueberries are finishing bloom. Arctic kiwis are in bloom and the haskaps (honeyberries) are turning blue.



We harvested our first Annapolis strawberries on June 29, courtesy of the heat and protection from a low tunnel. The low tunnels not only act like mini-greenhouses, but with bird netting on the ends, they keep critters and birds out, while protecting the fruit from rain.

With bloom and thinning done, it is tempting to pop a cold one, sit back, and watch things grow. However, before you do that, you might want to check the following to-do list:

1. Get netting on your haskaps or you will lose your crop to the birds.
2. Have Spinosad on hand and watch for sawfly larva on your currants and gooseberries.
3. Fertilize your blueberries now and again in 3 weeks. (Fish Emulsion 2 Tbsp/gal/25 sq. ft.)
4. Fertilize your raspberries if needed and tie canes for the winds to come. Select next year's fruiting canes and thin the rest for better airflow.
5. Train emerging shoots on newly grafted rootstock and top working grafts or new branches by tying them down, using stakes, and/or branch spreaders.
6. Water if things are dry. Deep watering is better than just wetting the ground. If using a sprinkler, water in the morning and set up a pan or rain-gage. Aim to put down at least a ½ inch of water.
7. Put up yellow jacket traps. New brood will be emerging soon and can be a real pest on haskaps, cherries, blueberries, gooseberries, and raspberries. I recommend the following [yellow jacket traps](#) and here is an [article with a bait recipe](#).

Rhubarb is a vegetable I realize, and not a fruit. But I remember when the USDA plant repository for rhubarb was housed at the Plant Materials Center in Palmer. APFGA went out for an orchard tour and we were treated to a presentation on rhubarb along with the measurements of sugar in the various cultivars. I remember laughing when it was pointed out that a human couldn't taste the difference in sweetness over the inherent acidity. In any case, it appears Cornell has taken up the mantle on rhubarb research and development. It seems like a missed opportunity for Alaska where rhubarb grows better in our cool summers than just about anywhere else. In any case, you can read more about Cornell's efforts in the article [High Stalks: could rhubarb be New York state's next big crop?](#)

Board member Chris Hellmann has worked to put together an orchard tour in Chugiak on Saturday, July 13 beginning at 1:30 pm. Put it on your calendar. We will have the opportunity to tour the Brown Hen Farm, visit former board member Tami Schlies place and possibly more. More information will be forthcoming the week of the tour.

If you are participating in the Geneva rootstock trial, please remember to keep good notes. I have already noticed that some rootstock cultivars did not take grafts as readily as others. I will be interested to hear if others had similar experiences. With the warmer weather, most are starting to put on some good growth. G.890 continues to be a top performer.

On that note, believe it or not, we are starting to submit our rootstock orders for next year's grafting workshop. Consequently, we will be asking you at the beginning of August for your rootstock requests.

Finally, during the summer, I begin working on organizing our winter speaker series. If any members would like to present on a fruit growing related topic or have suggestions for speakers, please [email me](#).

All the best,

Mark Wolbers  
President, APFGA

