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Alaska Pioneer Fruit Growers Association

Hello Fruit Growers!

It has been another wet and cool July. The Anchorage July rain totals for each of the last three years have been in the top ten wettest on record! The past month of July is the 7th wettest on record with 4.03". Almost two inches of that rain fell on the ill-fated day of the July orchard tour alone! On the good side, unlike last year's constant cloud cover, after each rain system the sun would appear for a few days. Consequently, new growth hasn't been stunted like it was in 2023.

You might think that a bit more sun would lead to higher Growing Degree Day (GDD) amounts. However, the average temperature as recorded at Ted Stevens International Airport for the month of July in Anchorage has been 1.5° F below normal. Although the sun helps the plants grow, clear nights are colder. Even with 17 hours of daylight, this morning was just 45° F in East Anchorage.

Ground temperature at 6" is now averaging around 59° F. Below are the monthly GDD amounts and the GDD year to date (YTD) totals for the past three years at our orchard in East Anchorage.

Year	July Total	YTD Total
2024	574 GDD/42°	1490 GDD/42°
2023	635 GDD/42°	1435 GDD/42°
2022	663 GDD/42°	1835 GDD/42°

August averages between 500-600 GDD/42°. At least 2000 GDD/42° are required for early apples (Parkland, etc) while mid-season apples like Prairie Magic and Carroll require 2300 GDD/42°. So, depending on the number of warm sunny days, and your individual micro-climate, it is likely that the early apples in the Anchorage area will be ripe sometime around the beginning of September. Mid-season apples will follow two-three weeks later. The close of the growing season for apples will be dependent upon when we get a severe radiative cooling event (clear night) that puts the temperature below 28° F for more than 4 hours.

Below are photos of plant development in our East Anchorage orchard as of July 31, 2024. Prairie Magic apples are averaging 50 mm. Evans cherries are beginning to move to straw color and average 13 mm. Swedish Black Currants will be ready to harvest soon. Raspberries and blueberries are beginning to color. Early haskaps (honeyberries) have been picked and later cultivars will be ready soon.



June bearing strawberries will be done soon (Cavendish in photo at top). The recommendation in the lower 48 is to renovate strawberries by cutting and removing the old leaves and applying fertilizer. However, I have found that this results in higher winter mortality probably because there is not enough time for the plants to fully regrow before winter sets in. Consequently, my recommendations have changed. You can fertilize if needed (fish emulsion), remove runners depending on your grow system, and remove any diseased leaves or some of the older leaves. But since we have very little disease or insect pressure, I don't see a compelling reason to cut all the leaves at this point and risk weakening the plants.

Here is a list of things to do in August:

1. If you haven't applied your second round of fertilizer to your blueberries, do it now (Fish Emulsion 2 Tbsp/gal/25 sq. ft.)
2. Select next year's fruiting canes in your raspberries and thin the rest for better airflow.
3. Submit your rootstock request for Spring 2025 by August 10. Just click the link and [email me your request.](#)
4. Put up yellow jacket traps if you haven't already. Yellow jackets can do substantial damage to ripe haskaps, cherries, blueberries, gooseberries, and raspberries. Click the link for recommended [yellow jacket traps](#) and [bait recipe](#).
5. Harvest haskaps, raspberries, and black currants as they become ripe. Test fruit for ripeness and pick. In damp conditions, mold can spread rapidly if ripe fruit is not picked on time. Highly perishable fruit like raspberries and haskaps should be processed or go immediately into the freezer unless you are going to eat them in the next day or so.
6. Submit a soil test. Remove any mulch or sod and take a soil core from the top 6" in various places of your orchard floor and mix them together. Send off a quart bag of soil to the lab of your choosing. I have used Brookside, Soiltest, and Midwest Laboratories. Dan Moore at Fire Apple Orchard uses International Ag Labs. I like Midwest because I can pay a bit more to use their database to generate mineral/nutrient recommendations based on my soil test results and the crop I select. However, this still leaves me the task of deciding what amendments to apply to fulfill the recommendations. In contrast, Internation Ag Labs will provide a list of suggested amendments. The UAF Cooperative Extension Service has more [information on soil sampling/testing](#) and an online farm and garden soil calculator that I find very helpful after I receive my test results.
7. Plant trees. Grafted trees grown in pots that are large enough can be planted at the end of August. This timing gives them a good opportunity to get settled before winter and are then are ready to go next spring. I generally grow grafted trees for 2 seasons in pots before planting.

A number of national events will be happening this month. They include the [2024 Wisconsin Hazelnut Week](#) which will include five field days (Aug 19-Aug 23). The [Orchard Bee Association](#) (OBA) annual meeting that will take place in greater Seattle, Washington (Woodinville) Thursday Sept 26th - Saturday Sept 28th that can also be virtually attended via Zoom. And finally, the CEAgWorld Conference (Controlled Environment Agriculture) that will take place Aug. 26-28 in Raleigh, North Carolina. Registration to [CEAgWorld Conference](#) includes full access to the exhibit hall, keynote presentations, general sessions, breakout sessions, lunches, networking breaks, parties, and receptions. If I were younger with some flat land, I would go to this conference to learn the latest about building and growing under cover in hoop houses/high tunnels, or greenhouses and the latest in climate control, building materials, hydroponics and more! If anyone wants to go, [email me](#) and I will give you a coupon for a \$100 discount on registration. Growing under cover is a great way to control the weather and lengthen the growing season for more dependable cropping of fruits and vegetables in Alaska.

Closer to home, our next Orchard Tour will be to Butte, Alaska starting at 1:30 pm on Saturday, August 24. We look forward to touring Ewe Topia Farms, seeing Ilona Farr's orchard, as well as Terry Thisius' orchard. More information will be forthcoming the week of the event.

Each November we hold our annual membership meeting to elect members to serve on the board of directors. The term of service is for two years, and each year half of the positions are up for election. If you have an interest in serving on the board of directors, or wish to know more, please [email me](#). For most of the year the board of directors meet just once a month on Zoom. Being on the board is a great way to learn more about growing fruit in Alaska and help Alaskans grow their own fruit!

Finally, I wanted to share a wonderful article in the UAA Green & Gold News titled [Researching Alaska's Apple Orchard Pollinators](#). APFGA has been a supportive partner in grant applications and research on pollinators in Alaska. A number of APFGA members made their orchards available for study. Read more about how John McCormack sampled for pollinators, and the research that is being undertaken so we can understand more about apple pollination in Alaska!

All the best,

Mark Wolbers
President, APFGA

