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Hello Fruit Growers!

Hopefully, everyone is enjoying the short but bountiful season of berry fruits. Haskaps and June-bearing strawberries are finished, but we are still picking raspberries, blueberries, a later black currant cultivar Titania, and have started to eat the gooseberries. What few cherries we have this year are coloring up. Ready this week will be Juliet and Romeo. Evans cherries will follow in the middle of the month along with the arctic kiwis.

In the photo above is the lingonberry cultivar, Ida. Unlike native lingonberries, cultivated varieties will flower twice during a season. The bees are enjoying the second flush of flowers even though they won't produce any ripe fruit before winter in Alaska. Nonetheless, the comparatively large berries from the first flowering will soon be ready to pick.

In Anchorage, the weather is in many ways a repeat of last year, but with an important difference. Even though both last year and this year have seen a similar amount of record rain fall since the beginning of June, this year has only had half the number of rainy days. What this means is that when it has rained this year, it has rained harder than last year, but then was followed by breaks in the weather that even included sunshine. Those breaks rarely happened last year.

An example of this was the record deluge August 6 – 8. In East Anchorage we had over 5” rain in three days. It was the most rain in a short period of time that we have witnessed in the fifteen years we have been at our current property. For the first time, the rain garden was a temporary duck pond.

You might think that more sunny breaks would put us ahead in terms of Growing Degree Days (GDDs). But one should remember that clear nights also radiate more heat. That combined with cooler temperatures has made it a bit of a wash regarding GDDs. But in terms of plant health and vigor the sun has been immensely helpful.

Below are the GDD August and year-to-date totals for our orchard in East Anchorage with comparisons to the previous two years. Ground temperature at 6” is averaging 56° F.

Year	August	YTD
2024	520 GDD/42°	2010 GDD/42°
2023	645 GDD/42°	2080 GDD/42°
2022	495 GDD/42°	2330 GDD/42°

If you grow purple raspberries like Royalty, and haven't already headed the first year (primo) canes, do so now. Because purple raspberries are the result of cross-breeding with black raspberries, the management of the canes is similar. First-year canes should be headed back to 3.5 feet. This will induce lateral side branches to form for next season.

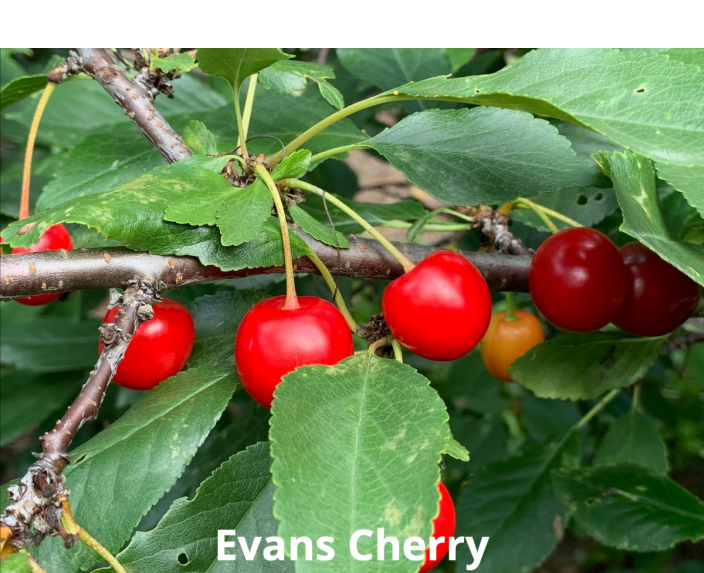
A couple of weeks ago I was invited to look at some full-size 50-year-old Siberian Crab apples on the University of Alaska Anchorage campus that had some brown leaves. With our wet weather, I fully expected to see fungal issues, and there were some on a nearby Royalty crab. But the large Siberian crabs had shoots affected in very specific areas, and not a generalized infection like one would find with fungal problems. Everyone feared fireblight. I had never seen a large, probably multi-year infection in Alaska before. So, I sent photos to Tianna Dupont at Washington State University and she opined that it was indeed fireblight.

Apple fireblight is caused by the bacterium *Erwinia amylovora*. It is rare in Southcentral Alaska because our temperature and weather are not conducive to the severe outbreaks via the blossoms found in warmer parts of the country. However, the bacteria is present in our environment and should wind, rain or insects cause openings on vulnerable young shoots, the bacteria can infect a shoot. It is hard to miss because the first-year shoot and leaves will wilt and die, turn brown, and those brown leaves will hang through winter.

I recently found 4 small new shoots on three trees (Whitney, Lee 27, Ft.Mac/Mac) in our orchard that appeared to have been recently killed by blight. It is recommended that infected branches be removed during winter pruning when the bacteria is dormant so as to not spread it. According to WSU, “compared to cuts made in summer, winter removal cuts can be made closer to the visible canker edge. In winter the pathogen is confined to the cankered area. Cut at the next “horticulturally sensible” site below the canker. You do not need to sterilize tools when you are cutting on fully dormant trees. Late dormant copper applications can enhance orchard sanitation, further reducing inoculum levels going into spring.”

Should you feel compelled to take action now, the [WSU bulletin](#) recommends removing “infected branches 12 to 18 inches below the visibly infected tissue into 2-year or older wood. . . although sanitizing pruning shears has been long considered important to prevent dissemination of fire blight infections (Van Der Zwet and Keil 1979), in multiple studies sterilizing shears made no difference in preventing canker formation (Travis and Kleiner 1997, Toussaint and Phillion 2008, DuPont 2023) as long as the cuts are made at the recommended distance below the visible canker.” However, I would suggest that an added level of security for the inexperienced grower could be obtained by sterilizing your tools for one minute in either a 10-1 bleach solution or rubbing alcohol in between cuts.

In the lower 48, fireblight is a serious and fast-moving problem that often starts with multiple blossom source points. In Alaska, it is more likely that you will only find an occasional infected branch or branch tip in August if at all, unless you have ignored a previous infection or your cultivars are highly susceptible. If you find any newly infected branches you can wait to cut them out during the winter or take a larger cut now. Cuttings should be taken from the orchard and put in the trash, burned or buried. Then in the spring follow up with a dormant oil/copper spray to keep inoculum low. Hopefully, next year our weather patterns shift back to something drier and closer to normal with fewer disease issues.



Despite the wet weather, apples on the trees are sizing well. Prairie Magic and Carroll apples are approximately 65-70 mm (2.75”). At our location, early apples like Parkland and Golden Uralian should be ready this week, with mid-season (Alaska) apples like Prairie Magic and Carroll ready at the end of the third week. Some cultivars like State Fair, and Whitney, throw up a bounty of sprouts that can inhibit light penetration. You can summer prune those shoots to provide better light penetration into the canopy and onto the fruit.

It is normal for apple trees to drop a few apples as they approach ripeness. Use them as test subjects to see how things are progressing. Is the flavor still starchy? Has the background color shifted? Are the seeds still completely white or are they starting to turn? I generally pick when the seeds are light brown and before they have turned dark brown. I find that apples, like Carroll, are best eaten fresh slightly before being fully ripe. Apples also store slightly better if picked just a bit early. Regardless, an apple ready to pick should release easily from the tree with a simple lift and twist of the fruit.

Apples being kept for long-term fresh eating need to be stored in the refrigerator immediately upon picking. It is important to pick only perfect fruit from the tree and to pick them before they are over ripe. Fruit that is bruised or damaged will rot faster. Do not wash the apples. Place the apples in the crisper or in a ventilated plastic bag that allows the ethylene gas to escape. Apples generally keep best at around 36-38° F. with high humidity (90%). So, it may be helpful to put a damp paper towel or sponge in the crisper. Since apples release ethylene gas, do not store apples with other produce like carrots. I have been experimenting with ethylene absorbers, but the jury is still out. Every cultivar has different storage capacities. Some hold for a week, others for a couple of months. My best keepers, Prairie Magic and Simonet, will hold through December.

We will have two apple pressings for members on Saturday, September 14, in Anchorage, and Saturday, September 28 in Wasilla. APFGA Board Secretary Doug Damberg is organizing the apple pressings. If you are willing to volunteer and help at the apple pressings, please [email Doug](#). More information, including sign-up information for each pressing, will arrive in your mailbox around September 8 and September 22.

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 those apples with a firmer variety so that they grind and press better.

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 might want to grow or graft at the spring grafting workshop! The tasting in Anchorage will be Saturday, September 21, at Begich Middle School 1:00-2:30 pm. The tasting in the valley will be Saturday, October 5, at Mid-Valley Greenhouse, Wasilla 1:30-3:00 pm.

More information concerning the two tastings will come your way around September 18, and at the beginning of October, along with a request for you to bring samples of your apples and fruit to the events. Please [email me](#) should you have any questions.

Our resident cranes are preparing for migration and a flock of geese just flew by my window practicing formation flying. These are just a few of the many signs that winter is just around the corner. It is extremely important to have rodent screens or tree wraps in place before freeze up! I use ½” wire cloth and put a 2 ft high cylinder around each tree. Push the bottom an inch or two into the soil so the voles are not able to find your tree when burrowing under the snow. Take steps to reduce your vole population now before winter. It is also recommended that you tie young trees to a stake for the winter to prevent snow-load from bending them over or breaking the leader. Should our first snow come before the leaves are off the tree, or is a wet/heavy snow, be prepared to knock the snow off your trees to prevent limb breakage.

Finally, if you haven't done so already, please send me your [rootstock requests for spring 2025](#). This is the best way to guarantee that you will get what you want or need for grafting next season.

All the best,

Mark Wolbers  
President, APFGA

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